

THE BATTLE OF  
KINGS MOUNTAIN  
*and* THE BATTLE OF  
THE COWPENS

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HISTORICAL STATEMENTS



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THE BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN  
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# HISTORICAL STATEMENTS

CONCERNING

## THE BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN

AND

## THE BATTLE OF THE COWPENS

SOUTH CAROLINA



UNITED STATES  
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE  
WASHINGTON

1928

HOUSE RESOLUTION No. 230

PRESENTED BY MR. STEVENSON

*Resolved*, That the historical statements concerning the Battle of the Cowpens, South Carolina, of January 17, 1781, and the Battle of Kings Mountain, South Carolina, October 7, 1780, both prepared by the Historical Section of the Army War College, be printed, with illustrations, as a document.

WILLIAM TYLER PAGE,  
*Clerk.*

LETTER OF TRANSMITTAL

WAR DEPARTMENT,  
Washington, April 21, 1928.

HON. WILLIAM F. STEVENSON,  
*House of Representatives.*

DEAR MR. STEVENSON: In compliance with the request contained in your letter of March 20, 1928, I am pleased to inclose herewith a historical statement concerning the Battle of the Cowpens, South Carolina, of January 17, 1781, prepared by the Historical Section of the Army War College.

Very sincerely,

DWIGHT L. DAVIS,  
*Secretary of War.*



THE BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN,  
SOUTH CAROLINA




OCTOBER 7, 1780



# THE BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN

## PART I

### THE SUBJUGATION OF SOUTH CAROLINA

HE Battle of Kings Mountain, South Carolina, occurred on the 7th day of October, 1780, and resulted in the defeat of Lieutenant Colonel Ferguson, who commanded the royal forces, and the loss of his command, not one man escaping from the battle field. The thoroughness of the disaster, and the death of the brave and highly trusted leader, was by far the most serious blow to which the British forces operating in the Southern Provinces had been subjected. The immediate effect upon Cornwallis was to put an end, for the time being, to the further subjugation of the Province of North Carolina. His contemplated advance from Charlotte Town to Salisbury was menaced by a new and unheard of enemy—the men under Campbell, Shelby, Sevier, and others—who came from the region of the mountains, and the backwaters that flow to the west; from places so remote and unknown to the British leaders as to be almost mythical. This avenging horde made necessary a hasty revision of Cornwallis's plans following Kings Mountain, which resulted in his immediate withdrawal to the South, and the concentration of his main army, detached posts, and flanking parties, into positions capable of rendering mutual assistance.

These hardy men of the Blue Ridge and Alleghenies, of deep religious convictions, were accustomed to the hardships and independence of a pioneer life, and in their mountain homes in the highlands and the backwaters they but seldom were concerned

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with affairs beyond their borders or interfered with by Crown or colony. When Ferguson approached their kingdom and threatened to invade their lands and lay waste their country with "fire and sword," and to "hang their leaders," he aroused their indignation and anger to such a degree that they determined to rid the country forever of this enemy, who menaced their independence and the safety of their homes and families. Had Cornwallis and his leaders known more about these mountain and backwater men, they would have carefully avoided all military and punitive measures which might tend to draw them from their mountain fastnesses to enroll amongst the enemies of the King.

The causes of the Revolution were but little known to many of these pioneers beyond the Blue Ridge. They were concerned in the establishment of their homes, breaking the soil of their new settlements, and wringing a livelihood from it; and with their rifles securing much of their sustenance. They sought the seclusion of the western waters; and in the valleys of the Holston, the Watauga, and the Nolichucky, found freedom in the exercise of their religion. Had the western covering force of Cornwallis's army, as it advanced into the Province of North Carolina, confined its activities to the plains and lowlands east of the Blue Ridge, and had not Ferguson from Gilbert Town uttered his threat of fire and sword and the hangman's noose, these mountain men would probably have remained in their homes, and but few of them would have joined with those who were in rebellion against the King.

The Battle of Kings Mountain was fought by men on both sides whose bravery should be a matter of pride to all posterity. The troops commanded by Ferguson were Americans, or persons who had come to the Provinces prior to the Revolution. His command consisted of about 125 picked officers and men, taken from several regular battalions raised in New York and New Jersey, and formed into a temporary Provincial Corps. These men were Loyalists, and they gave their services to the Crown with the same high sense of duty which prompted their brothers and neighbors to rebel against



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further domination by Great Britain. Supplementing the Provincial Corps was a greater number of Tory militia, enrolled in the Carolinas. Their services were offered for a variety of reasons; some because of their belief that the government of the mother country should continue, others because of expediency so that their lands and possessions might be given the protection of the British flag, still others served as soldiers of fortune under the flag which they believed would be successful, and a small number were influenced by a base desire to rob and plunder under the license usually associated with partisan warfare.

Under the confederated leaders, who commanded at Kings Mountain, were a few refugees from the lowlands, some small groups from the counties east of the mountains, and a large number of mountain and backwater men whose independence was being threatened by an alien invader. In answering the call to embody under their local leaders, there existed the definite understanding among these mountain men that they were going into the lowlands to fight, and that they would not return to their homes until they, or Ferguson, had been defeated.

At Kings Mountain the defenders used the bayonet and the rifle until their losses made surrender of the survivors inevitable. The attackers faced bullet and bayonet, and responded with an expert use of the rifle, with which they were familiar, due to their frequent stalking of game and Indians. The mountain men were not accustomed to the bayonet, but they were expert in taking cover behind rocks and trees. Ferguson was confident that his position rendered him secure against any untrained and unorganized horde which might attack him. His Provincial Corps were trained in the use of the bayonet and were commanded by competent leaders. The militia had received some limited training in the art of war, and were provided with long hunting knives to be attached to their rifles, in lieu of the bayonet. Their marksmanship was not as effective as was that of the mountain men, as conditions of life in the lowlands were not such as to make their daily existence dependent

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upon accurate use of the rifle. Ferguson was a trained soldier, an able leader, and, together with Tarleton, one of Cornwallis's most valuable lieutenants.

In both the Carolinas there was a large number of citizens, and probably a majority, whose sympathies at one time or another in 1780 were with the Royal Government. They believed that a rebellion could not, and should not, succeed. In commenting on the internecine warfare, carried on without cessation, General Greene wrote on the 23d of May, 1781, more than five months after he had assumed command of the Southern Department:

The animosity between the Whigs and Tories of this State renders their situation truly deplorable. There is not a day passes but there are more or less who fall a sacrifice to this savage disposition. The Whigs seem determined to extirpate the Tories and the Tories the Whigs. Some thousands have fallen in this way in this quarter, and the evil rages with more violence than ever. If a stop can not be put to these massacres, the country will be depopulated in a few months more, as neither Whig nor Tory can live.

The Battle of Kings Mountain was not an isolated action; it was the high spot of 1780 in the South. The surrender of Charleston, the defeat of the American forces at Camden on the 16th of August, of Sumter two days later, the many engagements of lesser importance, all added prestige to the royal cause, resulting in the complete subjugation of Georgia and South Carolina. Cornwallis had advanced as far as Charlotte Town in North Carolina and was preparing to move his headquarters to Salisbury, when the unexpected blow delivered by the mountain men at Kings Mountain brought to an immediate end the thought of further conquest and made necessary the withdrawal of the British forces into South Carolina and the assumption of a defensive rôle for several months thereafter. Therefore, to have an intelligent understanding of the Battle of Kings Mountain and its effect upon the southern campaign of 1780, it is necessary to know something of the movements of the King's forces from the time Charleston was invested.

The British land forces in America were commanded by Sir Henry Clinton, whose official title was "General and commander in chief of His Majesty's forces in the several Provinces in America

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on the Atlantic, from Nova Scotia to west Florida, inclusive." Vice Admiral Mariot Arbuthnot commanded the fleet, and Lord Cornwallis, who had been designated by Whitehall as second in command to Clinton, held a dormant commission giving him the rank of general in America, only, should an unforeseen accident happen to the commander in chief.

In the latter part of 1779 the Americans made an unsuccessful attempt to recover Savannah from the British, and following this failure the French fleet, which supported the move, departed for the West Indies. Clinton and Arbuthnot now considered the time propitious to make another attempt against Charleston, with the idea of occupying the Carolinas, giving support to the Tories and popularizing the Crown cause. Furthermore, such a move would result in curtailing colony traffic with Europe by way of the Chesapeake.

Upon completion of their plans, the amphibious expedition under Clinton and Arbuthnot sailed from its base, New York, December 26, 1779. Charleston Harbor was occupied, siege laid to the city, and on the 12th of May General Lincoln surrendered the town and its garrison.

Upon the capitulation of Charleston, Clinton considered that the major effort in the subjugation of the Province had been accomplished, and that, with this showing of the power of the Crown, most of the inhabitants would join the loyal cause. It would be necessary, of course, to occupy the country with a considerable land force, and thereby give protection to loyal sympathizers, but it was thought that the British regular force under his command would be largely augmented by Tory militia, who would aid in keeping the revolutionists suppressed.

Cornwallis commanded in the field, and on May 17 had a force of regulars to the number of 2,542 rank and file, which Clinton believed would be sufficient, when augmented by militia, to subjugate South Carolina and continue the campaign into North Carolina. At the same time Cornwallis was advised that in view of the

importance of his mission, troops were not to be stinted, and he was offered, by Clinton, any that he might desire from the garrisons of the several forts. For the initiation of the campaign, his army was to be augmented by the light infantry and the Forty-second Regiment, with the understanding that they were to be returned to Clinton as soon as they could be spared, as his contemplated operations to the northward would be cramped without them. Cornwallis was of the belief that he had sufficient regular forces to eventually control all the territory from the Floridas to Virginia, and on the 18th of May wrote Clinton that he would regret to see left behind any part of the troops destined for use elsewhere, and unless considerable reinforcements of Continentals should come from the northward to join the revolutionists, he would not need more assistance. He suggested that the publication of intelligence by Clinton that he and Arbuthnot were moving to the Chesapeake would probably stop off, on those waters, any reinforcements intended for the Carolinas. In case Clinton learned before sailing to the north that enemy reinforcements were well on their way, Cornwallis asked that his command be increased by some five or six hundred British or Hessians. It will be noted later that at this time Washington and Congress were preparing Maryland and Delaware troops, under De Kalb, to march to the South, and that, by resolution of Congress, these two States were transferred to the Southern Department.

On May 20 the light infantry and the Forty-second Regiment, promised to Cornwallis to supplement his forces temporarily, marched to Monks Corner and reported. At this time both the commander in chief and Cornwallis were hopeful that South Carolina would offer but little resistance to complete subjugation, although there was, in Clinton's mind, a measure of doubt, for he knew that the entire success of the campaign would depend upon whether or not "the temper of our friends in those districts is such as it has always been represented to us."

The time arrived when Clinton and the fleet could no longer delay departure for the north. La Fayette had returned to America



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on April 27, with the promise of his Government that a French fleet and army would follow him in a short time. Information of this early augmentation of the enemy forces reached Arbuthnot and Clinton, and they deemed it advisable to assemble the fleet and troops at New York, and for the time being make no move against the Chesapeake. Cornwallis was instructed that after he had finished his southern campaign of subjugation, and by his presence and show of force convinced the people that it was to their best interests to maintain allegiance to the Crown, he was to leave in the South such forces as he might consider necessary to dominate the territory, and send the remainder to the Chesapeake to assist in the operations which were to be undertaken there as soon as Clinton was relieved of the apprehension of a superior fleet and the season was far enough advanced to permit of campaigning in that climate. It was supposed at the time that the move to the Chesapeake could be undertaken in September or the early part of October. Cornwallis was to command the troops which would be concentrated for this operation.

From his headquarters in the field, Cornwallis corresponded with loyalists in North Carolina, informing them of his hopes for the prompt subjugation of South Carolina and advising with them as to what immediate militant acts, if any, they should engage in. It was not desired that any partisan of the King should become very active in the field at this time, for fear that the rebels would likewise become embodied and produce a situation inimical to the success of his army when it approached the border of the Province. However, if the loyalists considered themselves a match for the Whigs, and were determined to rise without further delay, he promised all the assistance in his power, by incursions of light infantry and furnishing ammunition. It soon became evident that this hopeful view of any early conquest was not to be realized, for there were many questions of supply and transportation to be arranged before the army could move far from its base, and matters of civil administration to be adjusted, so that the government of the territory in rear of the royal army would offer safety to the troops.

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Cornwallis had established his headquarters at Camden while Clinton and Arbuthnot were still at Charleston. On their departure, June 5, for New York, the responsibility for the campaign, and the safety of the loyalists and Tories in the occupied territory, rested upon Cornwallis solely. He arranged for the enrollment of militia under the British flag, for the organization and functioning of civil administration, and modified the proclamations issued at Charleston by Clinton and Arbuthnot June 1, and that of Clinton the 3d, so that greater protection would be given those who were loyal to the Crown and more severe punishment meted out to those in rebellion; and at the same time provided for the needs of his army. His command of 4,000 regular troops and a few Provincials had not only to occupy several important posts widely distant from each other, but from their numbers maintain in the field a force of sufficient strength to withstand local partisans and oppose reinforcing troops marching from the north. Posts were established from the Peedee to the Savannah to awe the disaffected and encourage the loyal inhabitants, and measures were taken to raise some Provincial Corps and to establish a militia, as well for the defense as for the internal government of South Carolina.

In the district of Ninety Six, which was viewed as the most populous and powerful in the Province, Lieutenant Colonel Balfour, assisted by Major Ferguson, who had been appointed inspector general of militia by Clinton, formed 7 battalions of militia of about 4,000 men, which organizations were so regulated that they could furnish 1,500 men at short notice for the defense of the frontier, or for any other home service. In addition to the militia, a Provincial Corps of 500 men was commissioned to be raised under command of Lieutenant Colonel Cunningham.

Other battalions of militia were formed along the extensive line—Broad River to Cheraws—"but they were in general either weak, or not much to be relied on for their fidelity." The refugees, who were now returning to their native country, were organized into the First South Carolina Regiment.

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A Provincial Corps, to consist of 500 men, was put in commission, to be raised between the Peedee and Wateree, under the command of Major Harrison. In order to protect the raising of this corps, and to awe this large tract of disaffected country the Seventy-first Regiment and a troop of dragoons under Major McArthur were posted at Cheraw Hill on the Peedee.

Other small posts were likewise established in the front and on the left of Camden, at which place the main body of the army was posted, and which was considered a fairly healthy place for the troops.

Having made the above arrangements, and everything wearing the face of tranquillity and submission, Cornwallis set out on the 21st of June for Charleston, leaving the command of the troops on the frontier to Lord Rawdon, who was, after Brigadier General Patterson, the commandant at Charleston, the next in rank in the southern district.

It was about this time that Cornwallis changed the instructions previously given his friends in the northern Province relative to their rising in aid of the Crown. He now considered it ill advised to march his army through North Carolina before the harvest, and took strong measures to induce impatient partisans not to rise until after the crops had been gathered, and under no conditions to act until he advised them that the time was propitious.

On June 30 he wrote to Clinton that with the capitulation of Ninety Six, and the dispersion of a party of rebels who had assembled at an ironwork on the northwest border of the Province, there was an end to all resistance in South Carolina. He reported the forces of the enemy in North Carolina as about 100 militia under General Caswell, 400 or 500 militia at or near Salisbury under General Rutherford, and 300 Virginians in that neighborhood under Porterfield. The force which gave him the most concern, however, was 2,000 Maryland and Delaware troops under Major General Baron De Kalb.

Now that the strongholds in the northwest part of South Carolina were in his possession, Cornwallis thought he could leave this

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Province in security, and march about the beginning of September with a body of troops into the back part of North Carolina, "with the greatest probability of reducing that Province to its duty." Having in mind Clinton's instructions that troops which could be spared later would be used at a probable early date on the Chesapeake, Cornwallis wrote in regard to his contemplated move into North Carolina:

I am of opinion that (besides the advantage of possessing so valuable a Province) it would prove an effectual barrier for South Carolina and Georgia; and could be kept, with the assistance of our friends there, by as few troops as would be wanted on the borders of this Province, if North Carolina should remain in the hands of our enemies.

This hopeful view of the situation, based largely upon the success of the royal arms up to this time, was soon to be shattered. While Cornwallis was still at Charleston his intelligence reported that Sumter, with about 1,500 militia, was advancing from the north as far as the Catawba settlement, and that many disaffected South Carolinians from the Waxhaw and other settlements on the frontier, whom Lord Rawdon at Camden had put on parole, were availing themselves of the general release of the 20th of June, and joining Sumter. It was also reported that De Kalb's army was continuing its movement south, followed by 2,500 Virginia militia. Cornwallis informed Clinton of these developments in a letter of July 14, stating:

The effects of the exertions which the enemy are making in these two Provinces will, I make no doubt, be exaggerated to us. But upon the whole there is every reason to believe that their plan is not only to defend North Carolina, but to commence offensive operations immediately; which reduces me to the necessity, if I wanted the inclination, of following the plan which I had the honor of transmitting to your excellency in my letter of the 30th of June, as the most effectual means of keeping up the spirits of our friends and securing this Province.

The plan referred to by Cornwallis was the occupation of North Carolina, and holding it as the frontier of the southern district.

The work of supplying the base at Camden with salt, rum, regimental stores, arms, and ammunition was under way, so that



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a further advance of the army beyond that point would be safeguarded. Due to the distance of transportation and the excessive heat of the season, the work was one of infinite labor, requiring considerable time. Then, too, the several actions in which his forces had been engaged made Cornwallis more and more doubtful as to the value of his militia. He wrote to Clinton that dependence upon these troops for protecting and holding in South Carolina, in case of an advance of his army into North Carolina, was precarious, as their want of subordination and confidence in themselves would make a considerable regular force always necessary for the defense of the Province, until North Carolina was completely subjugated.

The plan of campaign of the Crown forces to the north contemplated using Ferguson's corps, augmented by militia of the Ninety Six district who were being trained by Ferguson, as a left covering force to advance to the borders of Tryon County, now Rutherford and Lincoln, paying particular attention to the mountain regions in securing protection for the advance of the main body from Camden. Lieutenant Colonel Cruger, who commanded at Ninety Six, was to remain there with his corps. Innes, with the remainder of the militia of that district, was to guard the frontier, which would require careful attention, as there were many disaffected, and many constantly in arms.

The continued advance southward of the American troops previously reported in North Carolina was known to Cornwallis. While still in Charleston, on August 9, he received an express from Camden informing him that General Gates, accompanied by Caswell and Rutherford, was approaching with every appearance of an intent to attack Lord Rawdon, who had assembled several regiments on the west branch of Lynches Creek. These troops were more or less sickly, particularly the Seventy-first Regiment, the two battalions of which had not more than 274 men under arms. On the 6th Sumter had attacked the British post at Hanging Rock, where the infantry of the Legion and Governor Browne's corps were posted. He had been repulsed, but not without difficulty.

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These accounts alarmed Cornwallis, and he proceeded from Charleston to join the army in the field. At the same time he wrote to Clinton:

If we succeed at present, and are able to penetrate into North Carolina, without which it is impossible to hold this province, your Excellency will see the absolute necessity of a diversion in the Chesapeake, and that it must be done early.

Cornwallis reached Camden on the 13th of August. Gates's command had approached very close, and on the morning of the 16th the two armies met and fought the Battle of Camden, resulting in the defeat of Gates. Following this victory, Cornwallis determined upon the destruction or dispersion of the corps under Sumter, as it might prove a foundation for assembling the routed army, and on the morning of the 17th he detached Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton with the Legion cavalry and infantry, and the corps of light infantry, in all about 350 men, to pursue and attack Sumter. Orders were also sent to Lieutenant Colonel Turnbull and Major Ferguson, on the Little River, to put their corps in motion immediately, and on their side to pursue and attack the same enemy. Tarleton was successful in surprising Sumter on the 18th at Fishing Creek, near the Catawba. The latter, with a corps of about 800 men, was escorting 250 prisoners and a large quantity of stores, artillery, and ammunition. Sumter himself escaped, though with difficulty, but his whole corps was killed, taken, or dispersed.

In writing of the Battle of Camden, Cornwallis stated that above 1,000 were killed and wounded, and about 800 taken prisoners; that his army captured 7 pieces of brass cannon, all the enemy ammunition, wagons, a great number of arms, and 130 baggage wagons; "in short, there never was a more complete victory." The British loss was reported as 300 killed and wounded, chiefly of the Thirty-third Regiment and the Volunteers of Ireland. Among the Americans wounded were Major General Baron De Kalb and Brigadier General Rutherford. Baron De Kalb died of his wounds. In a letter to Lord Germain written August 21, Cornwallis said that on arriving in Camden the night of the 13th, he found there Lord Raw-

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don's entire force, except a small detachment under Lieutenant Colonel Turnbull, which fell back from Rocky Mount to Major Ferguson's posts of the militia at Ninety Six, on Little River.

I had my option to make, either to retire or attack the enemy, for the position at Camden was a bad one to be attacked in, and by General Sumpter's advancing down the Wateree, my supplies must have failed me in a few days.

These two decisive engagements, following so closely upon each other, brought deep despair to the revolutionists and great elation to the victors. In Cornwallis's letter to Lord Germain referred to above and written five days after Camden and three days after the defeat of Sumter, he declared that the rebel forces were dispersed and that internal commotions and insurrections in the Province would now subside. He stated that he had given directions to inflict exemplary punishment on some of the most guilty, in hopes to deter others in future "from tampering with allegiance, with oaths, and with the lenity and generosity of the British Government." The orders of Cornwallis were that all inhabitants of the Province who had submitted, and later took part in the revolt against the King, should be punished with the greatest vigor, imprisoned, and their property taken or destroyed. He ordered in the most positive manner that every militiaman who had borne arms under him, and afterwards joined the enemy, should be immediately hanged. Cruger, who commanded at Ninety Six, was directed to take the most vigorous measures to extinguish the rebellion in his district, and to obey in the strictest manner the directions given relative to the treatment of the country. It will be seen later how the execution of these instructions in the region of the Blue Ridge and Alleghenies resulted in the mountain men swarming from their homes to defend their freedom and independence.

Now that no further opposition to the advance into North Carolina existed, on the morning of the 17th of September Cornwallis dispatched messengers into that Province with directions to his friends there to take arms and assemble immediately, and to seize the most violent people and all the military stores and maga-

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zines belonging to the rebels, and to intercept all stragglers from the routed army. He promised to march without loss of time to their support. Much to Cornwallis's disappointment, however, the people of the northern Province were not as prompt in rising as he had hoped. Their inclinations were held in check due to the large number of revolutionists whom they had observed marching to the south to oppose the royal forces, and they preferred to await the arrival of the British Army in their neighborhood before taking an open stand. Cornwallis was hopeful that Clinton would start, at an early date, the contemplated move to the Chesapeake, thereby relieving the situation on his northern front. He wrote to him that next to the security of New York, the operations in the Chesapeake were one of the most important objects of the war.

About this time Major Wemyss was sent with a detachment of the Sixty-third Regiment, mounted, some refugees, Provincials, and militia, to disarm in the most rigid manner the country between the Santee and Peedee, and to punish severely all those who submitted or pretended to live peaceably under his majesty's Government since the reduction of Charleston, and who had later revolted. Cornwallis himself ordered several militiamen to be executed, who had voluntarily enrolled and borne arms under the British flag and afterwards revolted to the enemy.

Plans were made to move the first division of the army into North Carolina by way of Charlotte Town and Salisbury, about September 6 or 7. The second division would follow in about 10 days with convalescents and stores. A more prompt move following the successes at Camden and Fishing Creek could not be made, due to the number of sick and wounded, and the want of transport. The advance was started on the 8th and Charlotte Town reached the 26th of September.

During September Ferguson operated in Ninety Six and from there moved into what had been Tryon County, North Carolina, accompanied by about 800 militia collected from the neighborhood of Ninety Six. Protection was to be given to the friends of the




Crown, who were supposed to be numerous in that locality, and it was intended that he should pass the Catawba River and endeavor to preserve tranquillity in the rear and flank of the army. It was while on this duty that the loss of his entire command occurred at Kings Mountain on the 7th of the following month. Without some knowledge of Cornwallis's campaign in South Carolina, and from thence into North Carolina as far as Charlotte Town, the necessity for his immediate retirement from the northern Province, following Kings Mountain, would not be understood. It is now necessary to refer to the group of leaders and the troops which they commanded, who succeeded, so unexpectedly and so decisively, in dealing this staggering blow to Ferguson, and in compelling Cornwallis to place his army on the defensive.

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## PART II



### GATHERING OF THE PATRIOTS~THE BATTLE

T will be recalled that following the defeat of General Gates at Camden on the 16th of August, Cornwallis issued immediate instructions to his two flying groups under Tarleton and Ferguson, to pursue Colonel Sumter, who, following the dispersion of Gates's forces, had the only organized corps of patriots in South Carolina. These instructions, together with detailed information of the magnitude of the defeat of the troops under Gates, reached Ferguson on the 19th. Immediate preparations were made to comply with the orders, and at 7 in the evening Ferguson put his column in motion. At that moment an express arrived from Colonel Innes, who was on his way from Ninety Six to join Ferguson, informing him that he had been attacked at Musgroves Mills on the Enoree River on the 18th, with severe loss, and asking for support, as his militia had deserted him. Ferguson altered his plans and marched in the direction of Innes, crossing the Broad at sunrise.

The troops which had engaged the Loyalists and Tories on the Enoree were commanded by Colonels Williams, Shelby, and Clarke. Following this success, a move against Cruger, commanding at Ninety Six, was contemplated, but just at this time word was received of the defeat of the patriots at Camden two days before, and following a council of the commanders it was decided to rejoin McDowell's corps. Due to the nearness of Ferguson, the march northward, encumbered by prisoners, was one of many difficulties, and it was with great relief that Williams's party rejoined McDowell's corps in the mountains at Gilbert Town, to which point the latter had retired. Here the seriousness of the cause of the patriots was discussed. It was thought that Ferguson would immediately

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advance to overtake them, and further withdrawal into the mountains seemed expedient. It was proposed by Shelby and Sevier, who were from the counties of North Carolina where the waters flowed to the westward, and now part of Tennessee, that the troops should disband, and all return to their homes to raise an army of volunteers to defeat Ferguson, or any other leader who might operate along the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge. This proposition received general support, and Shelby and Sevier, with their followers, departed for their backwater homes, and word was sent to the leaders of Wilkes and Surry Counties to embody their followers and prepare for a rising.

This was a period of great distress to the patriotic cause throughout the entire State. It was only the mountains that furnished refuge for those who still refused to accept British sovereignty, and a number of refugees, especially those who had borne arms against the King, were seeking protection within their barriers.

Following the quick withdrawal of Colonel Williams and his confederated command from Musgroves Mills, Ferguson made no effort to pursue him. His marches from day to day were short, and on the 23d of August he left his command to go to Camden to confer with Cornwallis, rejoining his troops September 1, with the news that his Provincial Corps were to be separated from the army and act on the frontier with the militia. During the following week he marched to the northward, and on the 7th of September his command crossed into North Carolina, and he, with about 50 of the American volunteers and 300 militia, proceeded to Gilbert Town, to surprise a party of patriots who were reported there. On the following day the remainder of the command moved to the Broad, where on the 10th their commander rejoined them.

While Ferguson was at Gilbert Town he paroled one of his prisoners and sent him into the mountains with a message to the leaders there, "that if they did not desist from their opposition to the British arms, and take protection under his standard, he would march his army over the mountains, hang their leaders, and lay their country waste with fire and sword."



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The effect of this message was to augment the determination of the mountain leaders to get together their men with all speed possible and march against their hated enemy. The magnitude of their undertaking was fully appreciated, especially as many of these mountain settlements were of but recent creation, and the inhabitants not very numerous, and without security from the Cherokees, except such as was furnished by their own trusty rifles.

As the adjacent territory of Virginia was equally interested in stopping the advance of this hostile invader, cooperation and assistance of the Washington County troops was sought. Early in September the county lieutenant, Col. Arthur Campbell, was in Richmond, and in an interview with the Governor of Virginia was informed of the measures about to be taken to retrieve the misfortunes of the troops under Gates and Sumter. He returned to his western home imbued with the idea of the part his militia should take in the ensuing campaign, and at once showed a willingness and desire to cooperate in the undertaking that Shelby, Sevier, and others were engaged in.

Ferguson's withdrawal southward from Gilbert Town on the 10th of September was for the purpose of rejoining the main part of his command, which had taken a stand on the Broad to keep a lookout for a reputed body of Georgians who were approaching. The following morning he put his assembled command in motion, and on the 12th led a small party to the head of Cane Creek in Burke County, in pursuit of McDowell and his refugee followers, who were on their way over the mountains to seek shelter pending the assembly of the various county regiments that were to move against Ferguson. A slight skirmish resulted, but McDowell's force was able to extricate itself and continue its retirement with but few losses. The pursuit was continued on the 15th and 16th to the banks of the Catawba, where, at Quaker Meadows, was the home of the McDowells, but the pursuers arrived too late, as the refugees were well on their way into the mountains.

In the ensuing week Ferguson campaigned from the Catawba to the Second Broad, and on the 23d entered Gilbert Town for the

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second time. The following day was busily occupied in receiving 500 of the inhabitants of the contiguous territory, who came in to profess their allegiance to the King. It was on this day that intelligence was received from Colonel Cruger of an action which had just occurred at Augusta, and to which reference will be made, as it had a decided bearing upon Ferguson's future plans.

Early in September Colonel Clarke assembled a body of troops and marched to attack the British post at Augusta. He reached his destination on the 14th, and found that the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Browne, with the assistance of some friendly Indians, had taken a position in a fort about 3 miles from Augusta. Clarke invested the position for five days, when he retired upon the approach of Cruger, who had hastened with assistance from Ninety Six, upon learning of the danger to this frontier post. It is known that Cruger's message to Ferguson informing him of these events reached the latter at Gilbert Town on the 24th, five days after Clarke withdrew from the vicinity of Augusta to fall back upon the protection of the mountains. This retirement placed him between Cruger and Ferguson, and Cruger asked the latter to cooperate with him in cutting Clarke off before he could reach a retreat in the mountains. With this plan in view, Ferguson left Gilbert Town on the 27th and moved to the Broad, and then to the Green River to await in the vicinity of their junction further intelligence of Clarke. By the 30th, however, Ferguson knew that his efforts to intercept Clarke on his return to the mountains were unsuccessful, as the latter had taken another route. In the meanwhile Cruger found that the pursuit of Clarke would carry him too far from Ninety Six, and as he was responsible for its safety, he returned to that post. At this time Ferguson was in possession of the definite information of the advance of the army of mountain men, who had started their march from Watauga on the 26th.

Reference has been made to the retirement of Col. Charles McDowell from his home, with his band of soldiers and refugees. He reached the shelter of the backwaters with a force of 160 men

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from Burke and Rutherford Counties. To this rendezvous on the Sycamore Flats, bordering the Watauga, about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles southwest of the present town of Elizabethton, Col. Arthur Campbell sent his brother-in-law, Col. William Campbell, with 200 militia from Washington County, Va. Later on he led to the same place an additional force of 200 men who joined the first group. It was necessary for Col. Arthur Campbell to return to the county under his jurisdiction and take measures to protect it from the invasion of hostile Indians. Shelby, at the head of 240 men from Sullivan County, and Sevier, with an equal number from Washington County, N. C., joined at the designated meeting point on the Watauga on the 25th of September.

David Ramsey, in his history of South Carolina, written in 1808, said that "hitherto these mountaineers had only heard of war at a distance, and had been in peaceable possession of that independence for which their countrymen on the seacoast were contending." They embodied to check the invader of their own volition, "without any requisition from the Governments of America or the officers of the Continental Army." Each man set out with a knapsack, blanket, and gun. All who could obtain horses were mounted; the remainder afoot. There is a tradition that before starting out on the journey from which many would never return, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterian clergyman of the settlement invoked a blessing and besought divine protection and guidance for the army.

The highway of their great adventure followed the only roadway connecting the backwater country with the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge in North Carolina. Leaving Sycamore Flats, the column marched up Gap Creek to its headwaters in Gap Creek Mountain, and there turned eastward and then south, following around the base of Fork Mountain to Toe River, and on up that stream to one of its tributaries. Here the route continued in a southerly direction until the top of the mountain was reached, between Roan High Knob and Big Yellow Mountain. From the mountain top, descent was made along Roaring Creek to the North Toe River. It is stated

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in the diary of Ensign Robert Campbell that the mountains were crossed and descent to the other side was started before camp was made for the night. Snow was encountered in the highlands, for an elevation of 5,500 feet was reached in this march. On the top of the mountain there was found a hundred acres of beautiful tableland, and the troops were paraded, doubtless for the purpose of seeing how they were standing the march, which was about 26 miles to this point. Campbell's diary states that the second night—that of the 27th—they rested at Cathey's plantation. This is placed by Draper at the junction of Grassy Creek and North Toe River. The diary does not mention the camping place of the 28th. On this day McDowell, who had previously left the column to go to his home in Rutherford County, returned with such information as he had been able to secure relative to the movements of Ferguson. The night of the 28th a council of officers was held, at which it was agreed that an experienced officer was needed to take command of all separate county units. It was decided that Colonel McDowell should convey a message to General Gates, asking that General Morgan or General Davidson be sent to them to take over the command.

Tradition has it that on reaching Gillespie Gap the troops divided, one group, including Campbell's men, moving south to Turkey Cove, the others going easterly to the North Cove on the North Fork of the Catawba. Ensign Campbell's diary gives the information that the fourth night, the 29th, Campbell's men rested at a rich "Tory's," and this place has been identified as being in Turkey Cove.

The following day the men who had camped at North Cove marched southeast down Paddy Creek, while those from Turkey Cove marched southerly down the North Fork and then easterly down the Catawba. The two forces joined on the banks of the Catawba near the mouth of Paddy Creek, and continued down the Catawba to Quaker Meadows, the home of the McDowells, where camp was made, after a march of about 27 miles for the southern



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column and about 23 for the northern. During the five days which had elapsed since leaving Sycamore Flats, about 80 miles had been covered.

Here the marching column of 1,040 men was joined by Colonel Cleveland with the men from Wilkes and Major Winston with the men from Surry, 350 in all, making a combined strength of 1,390. The time was now opportune for Colonel McDowell to depart for General Gates's headquarters, with the request of the several colonels that a general officer be designated for the command, and after turning his regiment over to his brother, Maj. Joseph McDowell, he departed on this mission the 1st of October.

We left Ferguson on September 30, at which time he had given up hopes of cutting off Clarke's force. His camp was at Step's plantation, 12 miles from Denards Ford of the Broad River. Being aware that the gathering hordes of the enemy were either at a concentration point east of the Blue Ridge or approaching it, Ferguson wrote to Cruger on the 30th informing him of this new threat, and suggested that it would be well if the district of Ninety Six called out more of its militia.

The following day Ferguson began his withdrawal from the vicinity of the mountains. He marched to Denards Ford, where he camped, and issued his last appeal to the inhabitants of the region to join the militia serving under the King. As it is typical of the inflammatory proclamations put forth by both Whig and Tory during this period of violent passions it is here given:

DENARDS FORD, BROAD RIVER,  
*Tryon County, October 1, 1780.*

GENTLEMEN: Unless you wish to be eat up by an inundation of barbarians, who have begun by murdering an unarmed son before the aged father, and afterwards lopped off his arms, and who by their shocking cruelties and irregularities, give the best proof of their cowardice and want of discipline; I say, if you wish to be pinioned, robbed, and murdered, and see your wives and daughters, in four days, abused by the dregs of mankind—in short, if you wish or deserve to live and bear the name of men, grasp your arms in a moment and run to camp.

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The backwater men have crossed the mountains; McDowell, Hampton, Shelby, and Cleveland are at their head, so that you know what you have to depend upon. If you choose to be degraded forever and ever by a set of mongrels, say so at once, and let your women turn their backs upon you, and look out for real men to protect them.

PAT FERGUSON,  
*Major, Seventy-first Regiment.*

Ferguson continued his march at 4 o'clock in the afternoon of the 2d, proceeding 4 miles, then forming line of action and lying on his arms all night. The following morning he got under way at an early hour, and after a long march down the Broad, halted for the night at Tate's plantation, 1 mile after crossing Buffalo Creek. These three marches brought Ferguson's command 38 miles nearer Charlotte Town and Cornwallis than was his camp of September 29 and 30. From Tate's plantation, where he remained until 4 o'clock the morning of the 6th, to Charlotte Town was 50 miles. In this position he could feel sufficiently close to the main army to be reinforced from it should the necessity arise. At the same time further intelligence would be received of the route taken by the mountain men, and their probable intentions; and a reply to his letter of September 30 could be awaited. Cruger's reply, which was dated October 3, was probably received at Tate's plantation, and doubtless prompted Ferguson to leave that camp and take up a position from which to offer battle. This letter was found on Ferguson's body, and as it was somewhat mutilated, its complete contents is not known. Nothing in the letter indicated that Cruger was going to take any immediate action. He said:

I don't see how you can possibly [[defend]] the country and its neighborhood that you [[are]] now in. The game from the mountains is just what I expected. Am glad to find you so capitally supported by the friends to government in North Carolina. I flattered myself they would have been equal to the mountain lads, and that no further call for the defensive would have been [[made]] on this part of the Province. I begin to think our views for the present rather large.

Cruger evidently believed that Ferguson had a difficult situation to face, but that he was equal to the emergency, and, without

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doubt, this was Ferguson's opinion also. At this time he knew the mountain men were in the vicinity of his camp site of September 30, 28 miles away, and that a day's march of those who were mounted would bring the enemy upon him, so in going to "Little King Mountain," as Allaire designates the place, on the 6th, and taking up a position which was most favorable for defense, and remaining there for 24 hours before the enemy came in sight, Ferguson acted with deliberation and with full intent to engage in battle, did the enemy take the initiative. The "Little King Mountain" position was about 36 miles from Charlotte Town, and had Ferguson desired to avoid battle with the mountain men, he could have marched on the morning of the 7th halfway to army headquarters.

The letter which Ferguson wrote to Cornwallis October 6, in which he said, "I am on my march towards you, by a road leading from Cherokee Ford, north of Kings Mountain. Three or four hundred good soldiers, part dragoons, would finish the business. Something must be done soon. This is their last push in this quarter," is indicative of the subordinate commander whose duty it is to keep his superior informed of the forces opposed to him, and, when the enemy is in such strength as to be a serious menace, to suggest that reinforcement would insure a more certain success. In this letter Ferguson mentioned that "they are since joined by Clarke and Sumpter." Ferguson had the mistaken idea that Clarke, on his withdrawal northward from Augusta to the mountains, had joined the mountain men. Some of the men of Sumter's command, under Colonel Williams, did join about this time, as will be noted later.

When the mountain men left their rendezvous on the Catawba October 1, they marched to the southward, up Silver Creek, past Pilot Mountain, and from thence down Cane Creek in the direction of Gilbert Town. Although the several organization commanders had sent to Gates for an officer to command, it was considered unwise to continue further without coordinated leadership, and on this day a conference was held which resulted in the selection of

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Colonel Campbell to command all the groups, until a general officer should arrive. The command was intrusted to the colonel of the Virginia regiment to prevent dispute were an attempt made to name a leader from the North Carolina colonels.

On the 2d the march was continued toward Gilbert Town, from which Ferguson had departed five days previous. Continuing on to the south, the Cowpens were reached on the 6th, the march being directed toward Ninety Six, as it was thought Ferguson was falling back in the direction of Cruger. At the Cowpens Col. James Williams, of South Carolina, with 400 men, joined. This new party was made up largely of groups of Sumter's men from South Carolina, under Colonels Hill and Lacey, of men from Lincoln County under Graham, Hambright, and Chronicle, and a small number embodied by Colonel Williams in North Carolina. On the 2d of October Williams had written to General Gates that with a force of 450 horsemen he was in pursuit of Ferguson, and that he expected to join the mountain men in the accomplishment of this purpose.

Colonel Campbell was informed by the new arrivals that the enemy lay encamped somewhere near the Cherokee Ford of the Broad River, and plans were made for immediate pursuit. A council of the principal officers was held, and it was decided to select 900 of the best horsemen and leave the weak horses and footmen to follow as fast as possible.

Time was pressing, and the necessity for immediate action great, for if Ferguson continued his withdrawal in the direction of Charlotte Town another day's march, he would be so near the main army that to engage him would be a most hazardous enterprise. As soon, therefore, as the selected group was formed, the command mounted, and at 8 o'clock started on its long night ride, which the next day was to terminate in the encounter so eagerly sought.

Cherokee Ford of the Broad was crossed early in the morning, and the march continued along the northeast road topping the ridge between Buffalo and Kings Creeks. Information was received from several people as to Ferguson's line of march the day before, and



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finally as to the mountain top on which his camp was established. This camp site could best be reached by way of the main highway running from North Carolina in a southeast direction to Yorkville, S. C., so the eager patriots hastened their march to gain this road, passing Antioch Church and Ponders Branch, and stopping on the way only long enough to gain additional information. When the highway was reached, the column turned southeast, and after crossing Kings Creek began the gradual ascent of the rugged hills which lay between the creek and the enemy's position. An uncomfortable rain had added to the weariness of the sleepless marchers, but about noon the weather cleared, the sun shone with grateful warmth, and the nearness of the quarry added zest to the chase.

About a mile from Kings Creek the road passed between two slight knobs, and as the patriots emerged from the bottom of the ravine between these knolls, they found themselves upon a small plateau, overlooking to the southeast a sharp ravine, the far side of which terminated in a ridge, part of which was a hundred feet higher than the plateau, and on which Ferguson stood and offered battle. The broadside silhouette of the ridge was visible about 700 yards away, but the tree-covered slopes hid its occupants from view.

Continuing along the highway to the southeast for several hundred yards, to a point where the plateau terminates and the road begins its descent into the ravine, a better view of Ferguson's position was obtained. Beyond this point the column could not proceed until definite plans for the attack had been determined upon. The characteristics of the mountain on which Ferguson was making his stand were known to several of Campbell's command, and this information imparted to his leaders. While halted in the position which they had now reached, with the mountain occupied by the enemy in sight, the plan of battle was finally agreed upon. They could see a ridge about 600 yards long, the general direction of which extended north  $52^{\circ}$  east. The highest point of the ridge was near its southwest end, from which point, toward the southwest,

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there was a gradual dropping off of 20 feet to a very narrow hog-back, then a widening out of the terrain into a gently sloping, narrow plateau, which extended due north to the place where the column had debouched from the ravine between the two knobs.

From the highest point of the ridge, along its crest to the northeast, there was a gradual descent for 400 yards, then a very sharp drop to the highway. The northern face of the ridge descended to a stream which flows into Clarks Fork. The south face of the mountain was unknown to the leaders, except as described by those familiar with its features. From them it was learned that another stream led from the south of the mountain, and that several slight spurs projected from the ridge to the east and southeast, which gradually flattened out into comparatively level ground.

The plan of attack decided upon was to surround the mountain and trap its defenders in a band of fire, constantly decreasing in diameter as the mountain sides were scaled. To accomplish this maneuver, the command was divided into four parts, which were to be led in four columns abreast to the place from which the separate columns would proceed to their respective positions. The interior columns were composed of the men from Virginia and from Sullivan County, Campbell leading his men in the right column and Shelby his men in the left. The right flank column was made up of men from Surry, the Nolichucky, and Burke; Major Winston being at the head of the column, followed by Colonel Sevier. The detachment commanded by Major McDowell was joined to Sevier's command. The left flank column was composed of the men from Wilkes and those who joined the preceding day from the two Carolinas under Colonel Williams. Major Chronicle was at the head of this column, followed by Colonel Cleveland. The senior officer who accompanied the Lincoln County men into action was Lieutenant Colonel Hambright, but he waived his right to command in favor of Major Chronicle. The right and left flank columns were about the same strength, and each equaled that of the two regiments constituting the interior columns.

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In this order the several columns proceeded from the plateau into the bottom of the ravine north of the mountain. Here the right and the two interior columns halted, dismounted, tied their horses to trees and bushes, and left a small group of men in charge. The left column continued its march around the east point of the mountain, thence southwestwardly, to its position.

Shelby's men were deployed in the vicinity of the highway, from which position they were to attack the eastern extremity of the ridge. Campbell was on Shelby's right, along the bed of the stream. These two regiments were first in position, and had the most difficult terrain on their front, due to the sharpness of the slope and the height of the crest. Beyond Campbell, on his right, was McDowell, and then Sevier. The deployment of the latter was along the stream line leading up to the narrow hogback just southwest of the highest elevation of the ridge.

When the units in the left column reached their positions south of the mountain, they dismounted and formed line, with Winston, at the head of the column, connecting with the right of Sevier at the hogback. On the right of Winston was Chronicle, then Cleveland, with Williams between Cleveland and Shelby. All of the commanders cautioned their men to hold their fire until near the enemy, and to reform their ranks, if broken, and renew the fight. Appeal was made to their patriotism and love of liberty, although this was not necessary, as every man went into battle resolved to fight as long as life lasted.

Ferguson's Provincials and militia were formed on the summit of the ridge, which varied in width from 30 to 60 yards. His camp and wagon train were established here also. The crest was comparatively level within the narrow confines indicated, and free from trees. Rock outcroppings provided a limited amount of cover for firing positions. Pickets had been placed in the direction of approach of the enemy, to give warning of his presence.

The attack started at 3 o'clock, with the driving in of the covering forces. The center of the patriot army, under Campbell and

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Shelby, was the first to engage the enemy. The Virginia and Sullivan County men advanced up the steep slopes, taking cover behind rocks and trees, with a fair field of fire, as the underbrush was not thick. Their attack was sustained for about 15 minutes while the flank groups proceeded to their several positions, when the fire became general around the entire mountain. The groups then closed in, and Campbell's and Shelby's men almost reached the enemy lines, but here they were met by Ferguson's Provincial Corps, and at the point of the bayonet driven down the mountain. Their officers bravely rallied them, however, and under cover of rocks and trees the enemy fire was returned. The Provincials now in turn fell back before the sure marksmanship of the mountain men, and were pursued to the top of the crest, where a second time they resorted to the bayonet, and again forced the retirement of Campbell's and Shelby's men, but only to the point where, from behind cover, they had time to reload their rifles, and by their deadly fire stop the onrush of the enemy and compel their return once more to the ridge top.

When pressure of the right and left wings began to be felt by Ferguson, new dispositions had to be made of his forces to meet the situation. The parts of the encircling band composed of the men of McDowell and Sevier on the north, and of Williams, Cleveland, Chronicle, and Winston to the south of the mountain, closed in toward the crest of the ridge, and on its southwest extremity the enemy was cleared from the summit, and forced in a northeasterly direction into a huddled group.

About this time Campbell's and Shelby's men succeeded in gaining the portion of the ridge on their front, driving all before them, back into the group that the closing of the wings was compressing. The defenders of the mountain were now in sore straits. The losses among the Provincial Corps were heavy. These troops had fought with great heroism, but their numbers were too few to win alone. The Tory militia endured the contest as long as was to be expected of them. Ferguson's survivors were surrounded by an enemy fiercely determined to fight for complete victory.



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It was evident that nothing could be done to better the situation and snatch victory from defeat, and Ferguson determined to cut his way through the band of fire and escape. He, with several of his officers, made this desperate move, but was shot from his horse and killed instantly. Captain De Peyster, the second in command, bravely continued the fight for a brief time, but the confusion was so great, and his compact group of followers such a vulnerable target, that further resistance was suicidal, and a white flag was shown.

It was some time before the firing could be stopped. Units had become disorganized and intermingled during the fierce conflict, and all firing did not cease at the time De Peyster surrendered his command. Then, too, there were some who refused quarter to many of the Tories who asked for it, in retaliation for the treatment which they heard had been accorded Buford's command at the Waxhaw on May 29. To the cry, "Buford's play," many of the wounded were hurried into oblivion. The total number of Tories killed and wounded in this action was 334, and of this number 206 were reported killed.

The battle lasted an hour and five minutes. The report of this engagement, prepared by Colonels Campbell, Shelby, and Cleveland, and submitted to General Gates between three and four weeks after the battle, stated that the official provision returns for the 7th of October, found in camp, gave an enemy strength of 1,125 men. The losses given in the report for the Provincial Corps were 19 killed, 35 wounded, 68 prisoners; total, 122. The Tory losses were 206 killed, 128 wounded, 648 prisoners; total, 982. The combined totals give a strength on the battle field at the time of the action of 1,104, as no one escaped. In addition to Colonel Ferguson, the Provincial Corps had one captain killed; and among the Tories, two colonels and three captains lost their lives, and one major was wounded. The losses in the patriot army, as given in the report, were 28 killed and 62 wounded, a total of 90. The Virginia regiment suffered the heaviest losses. Campbell's command had 13

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officers killed or mortally wounded. The Lincoln County men lost their leader, Major Chronicle, and Colonel Williams received wounds from which he died the following day. The booty captured included 17 baggage wagons and 1,200 stand of arms.

A defeat so overwhelming as that suffered by Ferguson's command is rare in warfare. His position on Kings Mountain was selected after mature deliberation. The top of the mountain was just large enough to serve as a battle ground for his command and to provide space for his camp and wagon train. Water was near and plentiful. The advance of the attackers would be impeded by the slopes of the mountain. When attacked he could expect that retreat would be rendered hazardous by flanking or encircling detachments, a condition he desired, as his militia would be put to the necessity of fighting instead of fleeing. A better position on which to make a stand and fight could not have been found.

That he underestimated the valor of the mountain men is unquestionable. Their reputed superiority in numbers did not deter him from offering battle, otherwise he would have continued his march on the 7th in the direction of Charlotte Town. But had he known that these crusaders from the mountains would stand and fight with a fierceness heretofore unexperienced in his southern campaign, he would have been more discreet and less valorous. His epitaph, written by his brother officers and published in the New York Gazette of February 14, 1781, rings with affectionate praise and admiration for his many admirable qualities as a man and soldier.


The leaders of the patriots, and the men whom they commanded, were honored with the thanks of their several legislatures; and the thanks of Congress were given in a resolution of the 13th of November, as follows:

*Resolved*, That Congress entertain a high sense of the spirited and military conduct of Colonel Campbell, and the officers and privates of the militia under his command, displayed in action of the 7 of October, in which a compleat victory was obtained over superior numbers of the enemy, advantageously posted on King's Mountain, in the state of North Carolina; and that this resolution be published by the commanding officer of the southern army, in general orders.

## PART III



### CORNWALLIS ON THE DEFENSIVE ~ INACTIVITY IN THE NORTH ~ CONCLUSIONS

HE day following the battle the victors and their prisoners withdrew in the direction of the mountains. On the 13th of October they reached Bickerstaff's plantation, about 15 miles northeast of Gilbert Town. It was here that a number of the prisoners were tried by a court of officers, and 30 found guilty of "breaking open houses, killing the men, and turning the women and children out of doors and burning the houses." On the 14th nine of the convicted men were hanged.

Following this event the march was resumed in the direction of Virginia, in consequence of instructions sent by Gates on the 12th that the prisoners were to be escorted under proper guard to Fincastle Court House, Va. By the time the Catawba was reached, like all partisan groups, these men thought their mission being accomplished they could return to their homes, and at this time there were no more troops than prisoners.

On reaching Bethabara a halt was made, and on the 26th Campbell turned the command over to Cleveland, and he and Shelby repaired to Gates's headquarters in Hillsborough to arrange for the disposition of the prisoners. The official report of the battle was prepared some time subsequent to the departure from the command of Sevier and Lacey at Quaker Meadows, and was delivered to General Gates by Colonel Campbell October 31, or the day following.

Rumors of the disaster which Ferguson's army suffered probably reached the patriots in and around Charlotte Town late the following day or morning of the 9th. By the 10th Cornwallis's headquar-

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ters had received sufficient intelligence to cause great fear that a disaster of some nature had occurred, and Tarleton's command was ordered to proceed immediately to reinforce Ferguson wherever he could be found, "and to draw his corps to the Catawba, if after the junction, advantage could not be obtained over the mountaineers; or, upon the certainty of his defeat, at all events to oppose the entrance of the victorious Americans into South Carolina." Tarleton proceeded to the Catawba, where he received certain information of the melancholy fate of Ferguson. Upon crossing this river, to "give protection to the fugitives, and to attend the operations of the enemy," he realized the complete disaster to the royal cause in the surrounding country. In his book description of the campaign of 1780 and 1781, published in 1787, he said:

The destruction of Ferguson and his corps marked the period and the extent of the first expedition into North Carolina. Added to the depression and fear it communicated to the loyalists upon the borders, and to the southward, the effect of such an important event was sensibly felt by Earl Cornwallis at Charlotte town. The weakness of his army, the extent and poverty of North Carolina, the want of knowledge of his enemy's designs, and the total ruin of his militia, presented a gloomy prospect at the commencement of the campaign. A farther progress by the route which he had undertaken could not possibly remove, but would undoubtedly encrease his difficulties; he therefore formed a sudden determination to quit Charlotte town, and pass the Catawba river. The army was ordered to move, and expresses were dispatched to recal Lieutenant-colonel Tarleton.

Cornwallis's army left Charlotte Town on October 14, marching southwest to the Catawba, and from thence in a direction to cover both Camden and Ninety Six. Following the defeat of Ferguson, Cruger sent information to Cornwallis from Ninety Six that the whole district had determined to submit as soon as those in revolt against the King should enter it, and Cornwallis decided that in withdrawing it should be in a direction that would permit of contact with both Camden and Ninety Six. On the 29th of October Lord Rawdon, who was in temporary command of the British Army owing to the illness of Cornwallis, wrote to Sir Henry Clinton:



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Lord Cornwallis foresees all the difficulties of a defensive war, yet his lordship thinks they can not be weighed against the dangers which must have attended an obstinate adherence to his former plan.

Withdrawal from North Carolina was continued for more than 60 miles from Charlotte Town, before the army halted and went into camp at Wynneshorough.

On the 3d of December Cornwallis, who had recovered from his illness, wrote to the commander in chief from Wynneshorough of the various causes which prevented his penetration into North Carolina. Regarding Ferguson's mission toward the mountains he said:

The event proved unfortunate, without any fault of Major Ferguson's. A numerous and unexpected enemy came from the mountains; as they had good horses their movements were rapid.

Regarding his position at Wynneshorough, he advised that it was well situated to protect the greatest part of the frontier, and to assist Camden and Ninety Six. He determined to remain at this place until he learned of the intentions of General Leslie's command, on which his plan for the winter was to depend; meanwhile using every possible means of putting the Province into a state of defense, which he considered necessary, whether his future campaign was offensive or defensive. The extent of his disappointment and discouragement over conditions in the southern district are expressed in a sentence near the close of the above-mentioned letter, which reads:

After everything that has happened I will not presume to make your excellency any sanguine promises.

Campaigning in the South during 1780 consisted almost entirely of partisan warfare, wherein detachments of the Army, militia, and irregular groups fought over wide areas. The main armies were engaged but twice—at Charleston and Camden—both British victories. The territory involved, from Charlotte Town south, constituted a large portion of the colonial area, but the more important part, from the standpoint of wealth and density of population,

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was in the north. The seat of government was at Philadelphia; Washington's headquarters during the first of the year at Morristown; and the commercial center in New York, held, at the time, by the British. What concern was felt by Washington and Congress over conditions in the Carolinas was largely due to the uncertainty as to the strategy which Clinton would use in the North.

The year 1780, like those which had gone before, brought to Washington many problems of vital import to the American cause. The calm, dispassionate manner in which he planned for the Army and advised with Congress indicates a grandeur of character and a capacity for work too little understood. His faith in the justice of the cause and its ultimate success was unbounded, despite the fact that at times his optimism faltered and he felt that "we are tottering on the brink of a precipice." But this temporary despair is explained by his overwhelming surprise over the treason of Arnold. Matters of more casual concern, such as difficulties in connection with the draft, depreciated currency, lack of supplies, intermittently starving Army, general disaffection amongst the troops; all these had been his problems for a long time; they had been solved somehow or other, and he had faith in their solution for the future. He wrote to Baron von Steuben on April 2:

My sentiments concerning public affairs correspond too much with yours. The prospect, my dear Baron, is gloomy, and the storm threatens. But I hope we shall extricate ourselves, and bring everything to a prosperous issue. I have been so inured to difficulties in the course of this contest, that I have learned to look upon them with more tranquillity than formerly.

England was complete mistress of the Atlantic seaboard. Her fleet held the harbors of Halifax, Penobscot, New York, Charleston, and Savannah, and that the Colonies, as a consequence, had not suffered more than they had, Washington ascribed to the "feeble and injudicious manner in which the enemy have applied the means in their hands during this war." He realized that a fleet was essential to the success of the American cause, and only from France could this succor come. La Fayette had returned to Europe the pre-

ceding year to use his tremendous enthusiasm for the American cause as a lever to pry from the King and his ministers a fleet and an army that would make of France an effective ally of America. His return to the Colonies on the 27th of April, 1780, with the joyous tidings that a fleet and army were soon to follow, heartened Washington and Congress beyond measure.

The British Army in the North was quiet during the first half of 1780, due to the detachment of a considerable part of the fleet and army for operations in the South. The American Army was quiet, as tidings from France were awaited, and when the French fleet and army finally did arrive, Washington abandoned his winter quarters early in June and prepared for operations to secure the reduction of the city and garrison of New York. He estimated that he would have a force of from 30,000 to 40,000 men, after the militia joined.

However, with the blockade of the French fleet in the port of Rhode Island, the projected campaign to conquer New York had to be abandoned, and a season of comparative inactivity on the part of his army drew to a close in October. The following month arrangements were made to go into winter quarters again.

With both Congress and Washington, their principal concern was the main army under his command. What occurred south of the Chesapeake were collateral issues to which only a limited amount of thought, energy, and assistance could be given. While Charleston was undergoing its siege, Washington wrote to Philip Schuyler, who was in Congress:

What to do for the Southern States, without involving consequences equally alarming in this quarter, I know not.

Upon his recommendation, Congress detached the Maryland division to reinforce the South, and it fought with great credit at Camden. Later Congress added Delaware and Maryland to the Southern Department. It was felt in the North that Charleston would probably fall, in which case, Washington wrote on April 15, "there is much reason to believe the Southern States will become the principal theater of war."

## THE BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN

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After the defeat at Camden, Washington wrote to Count de Rochambeau on the 8th of September that "this event must have the worst effect upon the affairs of the Southern States. Nor is it easy to say how far its influence may extend." But it was expected that if the inhabitants of the Carolinas were vitally concerned in independence, they would rise in sufficient numbers to acquire it, at least within their own boundaries, and affairs in the North still continued to monopolize the attention of both Congress and Washington. However, there was sufficient concern to prompt action which resulted in sending to the Southern Department late in the year a competent commander, General Nathanael Greene. Receipt of the news as to how the mountain men overcame Ferguson thrilled the entire country, and Congress showed its appreciation of this magnificent feat in the manner already referred to, but beyond this it was but an incident of the southern campaign. Following Camden, Arnold's treason, and the inactive campaign of his army, on the day after Washington wrote that "we are tottering on the brink of a precipice," he said in a letter to General Cadwalader, "our case is not desperate, if virtue exists in the people, and there is wisdom among our rulers."

In considering the effect of the Battle of Kings Mountain upon the situation in the South, it was only this epic tragedy to Ferguson's army that halted Cornwallis in his subjugation of North Carolina. Without this, or a similar calamity, he would have reached the northern borders of the Province in December, and with the Chesapeake occupied by the British fleet, Virginia would have suffered the same fate. What the outcome of such a situation in the winter of 1780-81 would have been is problematic. In a letter to Count de Vergennes from M. de la Luzerne, the latter declared that the intention of the British was to sever the Carolinas and Georgia from the North. After the fall of Charleston, a gazette was published in that town in which the conquerors circulated insinuations that the Northern States had abandoned the South, and were about to make arrangements with England which would exclude the Carolinas and Georgia. The letter adds:



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These attempts had an effect. The Members of Congress are divided as to their interests and objects. Some are for using all efforts for rescuing the South. Others think the people there have shown too little zeal and activity in the cause, and that it is not expedient to put in jeopardy the safety of the North by rendering extraordinary aid to people who are so indifferent about their own independence.

\* \* \* It is possible that the British will make a proposition to the 10 Northern States tending to assure their independence; and their scheme will be to form into a new government the two Carolinas, Georgia, east Florida, and the Bahama Islands, which together would make a respectable possession.

That there was some foundation for the impressions above communicated is confirmed in a letter from Mr. Duane, in Congress, to General Schuyler, written the 21st of May. Said he:

That the reinforcements ordered to the southward should be halted is obvious for the reasons you assign. But do you expect such a proposition from a northern Member, deeply interested in strengthening the main army? It is a question of the utmost delicacy and even danger; for, however groundlessly, an opinion has been propagated, that Congress means to sacrifice the two southernmost States, and it has been productive of the greatest animosity and discontent. We have privately stated the subject to some of the southern gentlemen, who, though I believe convinced of the propriety of the measure, did not choose, after great deliberation, to have it adopted, much less to propose it. There is but one person from whom it can originate with any prospect of success. If we had undertaken it, nothing would have resulted but disappointment and the loss of personal confidence.

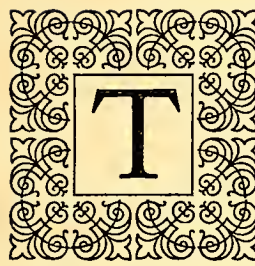
The Battle of Kings Mountain was the outstanding victory of the Americans in 1780. Following it, Cornwallis was compelled to abandon North Carolina, and for a time assume the defensive. It put an end to the possibility of an eventual peace with England under such terms as might have resulted in the retention of the southern Provinces under British rule. It is an exemplification of American aspirations for self-government and a display of romantic hardihood and bravery well worthy the careful study of American youth.



## PART IV



### THE BATTLE GROUND OF KINGS MOUNTAIN IN SOUTH CAROLINA

 HERE never has been any uncertainty as to the actual location of the ground on which the Battle of Kings Mountain was fought, but due to the defects and limitations in early maps, the battle has frequently been described as occurring in North Carolina. Many of the early maps show "King Mountain" north of the boundary line, with none of the mountain symbols extending into South Carolina. As a result the battle was accredited to North Carolina.

In 1772 a portion of the boundary between the two Carolinas was surveyed from the Catawba River westwardly. The origin of this portion of the boundary was the center of the junction of the Catawba and the South Fork of the Catawba. From this junction the line was to run due west to the mountains and there connect with the boundary of the Cherokee Nation.

The Price and Strother map, engraved in 1808, which purports to be "The First Actual Survey of the State of North Carolina," shows the 1772 line crossing the Broad River  $1\frac{1}{4}$  miles south of the east and west line through the junction of the Broad and the First Broad. This corresponds with the distance on the Gaffney quadrangle of the United States Geological Survey. By other checks of the 1772 line where it crosses streams, with the United States Geological Survey of the line, it is evident that both lines are one and the same.

On the Price and Strother map, and on all other maps subsequent to 1772 for many years, the boundary line from the junction of the branches of the Catawba is shown as running due west. It was



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later discovered that due to magnetic errors the line was run north of west. The United States Geological Survey maps show that this deviation is about  $2\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ . The 1772 line has been resurveyed and confirmed, but never has it been changed between the Catawba and the mountains, 68 miles west. The latitude of the 1772 line near its initial point is  $35^{\circ} 09' 01.5''$ . An inspection of the Kings Mountain quadrangle will show that the battle ground is much farther south, hence had the line been run due west, as was intended, the battle ground would nevertheless lie within the borders of South Carolina.

# THE BATTLE OF KINGS MOUNTAIN

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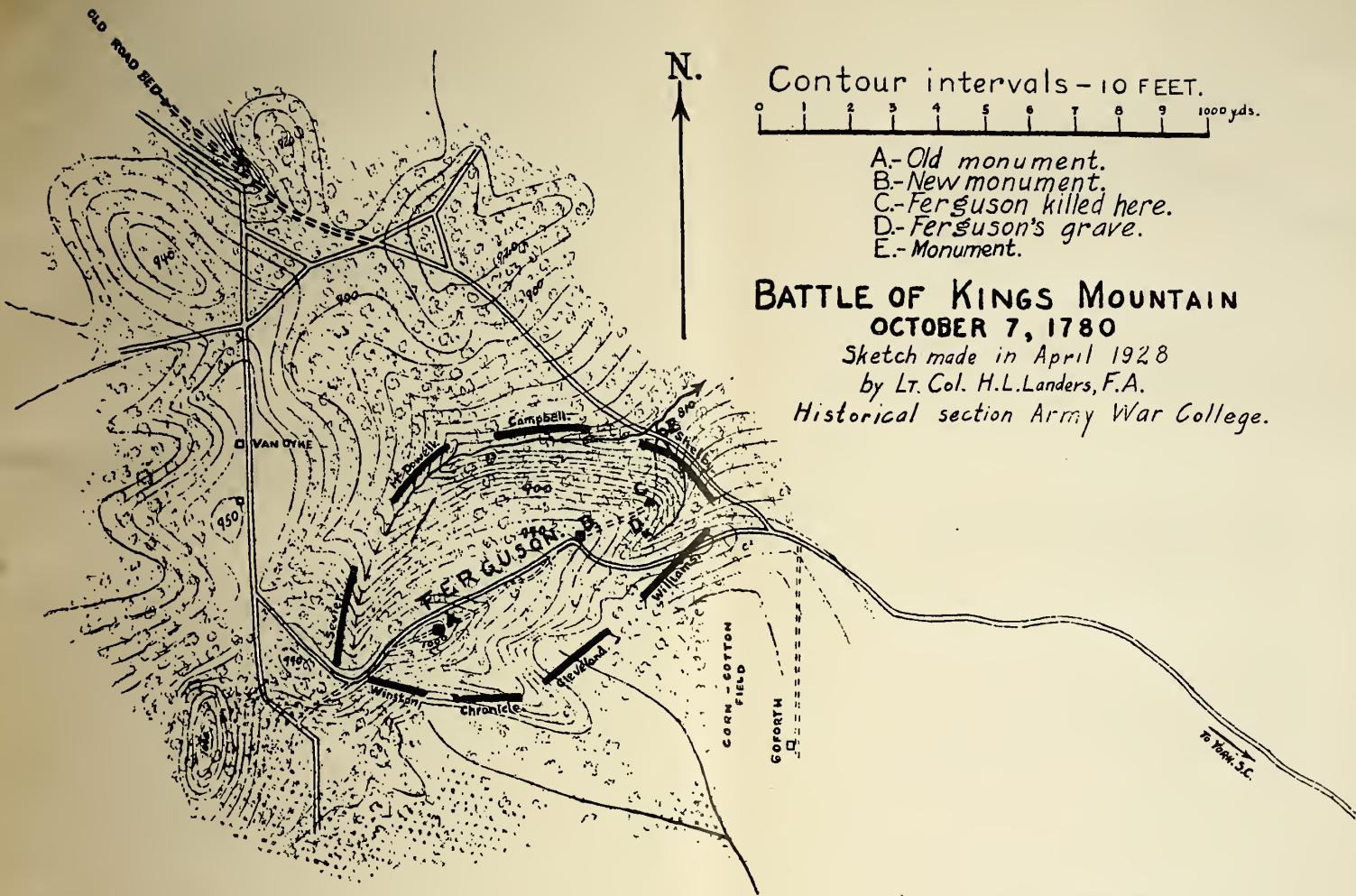
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THE BATTLE OF THE COWPENS  
SOUTH CAROLINA



JANUARY 17, 1781




# THE BATTLE OF THE COWPENS

## PART I

### BRITISH PLANS

#### TARLETON SENT AFTER MORGAN

HE Battle of the Cowpens was the second serious disaster which occurred to the British Army, operating in the Southern States, during the 1780-81 campaign. Following the capitulation of Charleston on May 12, 1780, all of South Carolina was in a condition of subjugation within a few months, and in September British headquarters were moved to Charlotte Town, N. C. Prior to this Lieutenant Colonel Ferguson had been detached, with a small force of Provincials, to organize the militia and operate on Cornwallis's flank. On the 7th of October his entire command was lost at Kings Mountain. Following this disaster the British field army was withdrawn more than 60 miles to Wynnesborough, and there remained on the defensive while awaiting information relative to the rehabilitation of Gates's army, now commanded by Greene; and in coordinating plans with the commander in chief, General Clinton, particularly with reference to the use of the troops under General Leslie, which were sent from New York to Virginia.

Lieutenant Colonel Tarleton, the only officer remaining after Ferguson's death used by Cornwallis for the command of roving troops, was sent into the district north of Ninety Six to oppose General Morgan, and somewhat later Cornwallis resumed his march northward. Tarleton and Morgan met at the Cowpens, on the 17th of January, and in a battle noted for the unusual tactics adopted by the Americans, the British were defeated, with heavy losses, by a force inferior in numbers, a considerable portion of which was militia.

The relation of the Cowpens to the southern campaign in 1780-81 can be understood only through a knowledge of the purposes of the two army commanders, Greene and Cornwallis, during the period following Kings Mountain. After General Clinton's departure from Charleston for New York on June 5, 1780, he conducted correspondence with Cornwallis relative to operations contemplated in the Chesapeake. In October General Leslie was given command of about 2,000 regulars, and sailed from New York to establish posts on the western tributaries of the Chesapeake, near its mouth. The letter of instructions from Clinton, given him before his departure, directed him to proceed to those waters and make a diversion in favor of Cornwallis, who, it was expected, would be, at the time of his arrival, in central and western North Carolina. The instructions suggested that he proceed up the James River and destroy enemy magazines at Petersburg, Richmond, and elsewhere, and finally establish a post on the Elizabeth River at Portsmouth, but that under any conditions he was to communicate as soon as possible with Cornwallis and act under his orders.

A copy of the instructions under which Leslie was to act was received by Cornwallis about the 24th of October, at which time he was withdrawing from Charlotte Town, and the possibility of carrying out at this time any plan of joint action in Virginia was very remote. Lord Rawdon, who commanded, due to the illness of Cornwallis, immediately dispatched a letter to Leslie, advising him of the defeat of Ferguson, with its consequent augmentation of defection in both the Carolinas, and of the necessity of the British Army remaining within supporting distance of Ninety Six and Camden until a more favorable moment arrived for the resumption of the offensive. From the circumstances related in his letter, Lord Rawdon expressed the fear that the two armies were too far apart to render Leslie's cooperation very effectual.

Although the British commander in chief had signified to Cornwallis that he was at liberty to give Leslie any direction for further cooperation which might appear to him expedient, Cornwallis was

loath at this time to instruct the latter to bring his troops to South Carolina. He feared that should he withdraw this force from the Chesapeake, he might interfere with other purposes, unknown to him, to which Clinton had destined these troops. Rawdon therefore informed Leslie in October that "Lord Cornwallis thinks himself obliged to leave you at liberty to pursue whatsoever measures may appear to your judgment best for his majesty's service and most consonant with the wishes of the commander in chief." In conclusion Rawdon informed Leslie that should his knowledge of Clinton's desires prompt him to make a trial upon North Carolina, a movement up Cape Fear River to Cross Creek was the most likely, at this time, to prove effectual. The general situation in the South was similarly described by Rawdon in a letter to Clinton of the 29th of October, wherein was stated the intention of not definitely ordering Leslie to the Cape Fear, as Clinton might have other plans with which such a move would interfere.

When Leslie learned of General Cornwallis's desire that he quit the Chesapeake and move up the Cape Fear to Cross Creek, knowing that Clinton had no ulterior purpose in keeping him in Virginia, he immediately planned to make this change and sent dispatches to Clinton on the 7th of November informing him of the new arrangement. This met with the entire approval of the commander in chief. A second letter from Lord Rawdon, written on the 31st of October, wherein he reiterated in a more urgent manner the wishes of Cornwallis in the matter, was probably the deciding factor in prompting compliance by Leslie.

Cornwallis established his camp at Wynnesborough in November. It was evident from the correspondence conducted with Leslie that he could make no move until he knew where the latter would establish himself, as his plans for the winter would depend upon this knowledge. The success of the Americans at Kings Mountain had done much to overcome the depression in the South, following the defeat at Camden, and partisan forces were active on both flanks of the British Army. Colonel Marion operated between the Santee



## THE BATTLE OF THE COWPENS

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and Peedee, and from this locality threatened communications and supplies for the post at Camden, and the army at Wynnesborough. Sumter and his subordinate leaders were active west of the Broad, threatening Ninety Six. Furthermore, the British had intelligence that General Morgan, with Washington's cavalry and a body of Continental infantry, was advancing toward Lynches Creek, with Camden as their objective.

Early in November Tarleton had been sent east of the Wateree, and on his arrival at Camden, finding no reason to expect an attack upon that place by General Morgan, proceeded down the east bank of the river against Marion. The two forces met on the 10th, but Marion, realizing he was outnumbered, retreated. During the pursuit an express arrived from General Cornwallis, sent from Wynnesborough the preceding day, directing Tarleton to lose no time in returning, as Cornwallis was "under the greatest anxiety for Ninety Six." The circumstance which occasioned this unexpected order was the predicament into which Major Wemyss, at the head of 40 of Tarleton's dragoons, and the mounted Sixty-third, had gotten. He was operating along the Broad, and learning that Sumter with about 300 men was near by, undertook to surprise him by a night attack. The British entered Sumter's camp by surprise, but instead of dismounting and securing the enemy arms, they remained mounted. Sumter's men recovered from their surprise, got their arms, engaged the enemy, wounded Wemyss, and as the second in command did not know his plans, the British withdrew.

Cornwallis's letter of recall to Tarleton written on the 9th was followed by another on the 10th, and a third on the 11th of November, so urgent was he that Tarleton appear in the territory of the Broad to retrieve the situation, and fearful that the other letters might not have gotten through. In the letter of the 11th he said:

I wish you would get three legions, and divide yourself into three parts. We can do no good without you. I trust to your coming immediately, unless you see something more materially pressing.

Tarleton hastened his return to army headquarters at Wynnesborough, and from thence continued southwestwardly across the

Broad, to locate and engage Sumter, who was approaching Ninety Six. There followed the fight at Blackstocks on the 20th of November, wherein General Sumter was wounded. Following this action Tarleton withdrew to Brierlys Ferry on the Broad. It was with much gratification that Cornwallis learned of Sumter's wound, for he wrote, "he certainly has been our greatest plague in this country."

The recovery of Cornwallis from his illness during the withdrawal from Charlotte Town, and the successes attendant upon Tarleton's efforts in the field, stimulated a desire to renew offensive warfare, and in November he decided to bring Leslie's force to Charleston, as cooperation with him even at the distance of the Cape Fear River would be attended with many difficulties. Leslie arrived in Charleston on the 13th of December, where orders awaited him to march up country with 1,530 men, to join Cornwallis as soon as possible.

The British plan of campaign for the winter of 1780-81 was for the main army to penetrate into North Carolina, leaving South Carolina in security against any probable attack. Offensive operations were to be started about the middle of January. The line of march was to be by the upper, or western, roads in preference to lowland routes, because fords were more frequent above the forks of the rivers, and the passage of the army could be less easily obstructed. Furthermore, General Greene being on the Peedee, and there being few fords in any of the great rivers of this country below their forks, especially in the rainy season, a penetration north, by way of Salisbury, would probably meet with much resistance by Greene's army.

Cornwallis was the more induced to prefer the western route, as he hoped to destroy or drive out of South Carolina the corps commanded by General Morgan, which, it will be noted later, was sent into the region of the Broad and Pacolet, during the latter part of December, to threaten the valuable district of Ninety Six. There was hope, also, that by rapid marches the British main army would

get between Greene and Virginia, and by that means force the Americans to fight without receiving any reinforcements from that State, or, failing in this, to oblige Greene to quit North Carolina with precipitation, and thereby encourage the friends of the Crown to make good their promises of a general rising to assist the British commander in reestablishing the Royal Government.

While Tarleton lay on the Broad, following the fight at Blackstocks, it became known to the British that General Morgan and Colonel Washington had been detached from Charlotte Town on December 20th and had proceeded across the Broad in the direction of Ninety Six, which post was viewed by Cornwallis as the most sensitive of all under his command. On the 30th of December Cornwallis advised Tarleton of this threat, and on the 1st of the following month sent his aide with orders that Tarleton should cross the Broad with his corps of Cavalry and Infantry of 550 men, the First Battalion of the Seventy-first, consisting of 200 men, and one 3-pounder, to counteract the designs of General Morgan, by protecting the country and compelling him to repass the Broad. The danger of Morgan's presence west of the Broad was felt so acutely by Cornwallis that the day after he dispatched his aide with this message to Tarleton, he wrote an additional admonition:

If Morgan is still at Williams's, or anywhere within your reach, I should wish you to push him to the utmost; I have not heard, except from McArthur, of his having cannon; nor would I believe it, unless he has it from very good authority; it is, however, possible, and Ninety Six is of so much consequence, that no time is to be lost.

Let me know, if you think that the moving the whole, or any part of my corps, can be of use.

On the receipt of this letter Tarleton immediately directed his course to the westward, leaving his baggage behind, but he had not proceeded more than 20 miles from Brierleys Ferry before he was satisfied that Morgan was nowhere near Fort Williams and that for the time being Ninety Six was not threatened. He therefore decided to camp, bring up his baggage, and make certain recommendations to Cornwallis relative to the ensuing campaign, as was

called for in the latter's letter of the 2d. Tarleton wrote on the 4th asking that his baggage be forwarded under escort of the Seventeenth Light Dragoons, the Yagers, and the Seventh Regiment. "When I advance, I must either destroy Morgan's corps," he said, "or push it before me over Broad River, toward Kings Mountain. The advance of the army should commence (when your lordship orders this corps to move) onward for Kings Mountain. Frequent communication by letter can pass the Broad River." It is to be noted that at this time Tarleton and Cornwallis occupied interior positions, separated less than 24 hours in messenger service, while Morgan and Greene lay beyond them in opposite directions, and from 5 to 10 days apart by messenger.

On the 5th of January Cornwallis approved the suggestions relative to combined action as mentioned in Tarleton's letter of the day before, and informed him that the Seventh Regiment was escorting his baggage to Brierleys Ferry, and that he, Cornwallis, proposed marching on January 7. Two hundred men of the Seventh Regiment, who were mostly recruits and designed for the garrison at Ninety Six, 50 dragoons of the Seventeenth Regiment, and a 3-pounder, brought the wagons from Brierleys Ferry to camp. Upon the arrival of the baggage and reinforcing troops, Tarleton crossed Indian and Duncan Creeks, and on his advance received accounts of the increase of Morgan's corps, which induced him to halt his march and request permission of Cornwallis to retain the Seventh Regiment. This request having been granted, on the 12th he continued his course to the westward in order to discover the most practicable fords, and the Enoree and Tiger were passed on the 14th, above the Cherokee Road. That evening Tarleton obtained information that Morgan was on the Pacolet, guarding all the fords. In the meanwhile Cornwallis's march northward had not been made in accordance with his plans, as the junction of Leslie's command had been much retarded by high waters, and it was not until the 14th that "Leslie is at last out of the swamps," at which time Cornwallis was at Bull Run.




On the 15th Tarleton made a reconnaissance of Morgan's dispositions covering the fords of the Pacolet, and that evening a feint was made to cross high up the river. The morning of the 16th this course was altered, as it was now known that Morgan had withdrawn from the Pacolet, and a passage was secured within 6 miles of the hostile camp. The British continued their march for several miles, and halted in some log huts to rest and reconnoiter Morgan's whereabouts. Tarleton intended to post his troops behind the huts in case Morgan showed an inclination to attack him in this position. In his narrative he says that the camp afforded a plentiful supply of half-cooked provisions, left by the Americans that day. Patrols and spies were dispatched to observe the Americans during the night, and dragoons followed until dark, when they were ordered back to the main body. Early in the night the patrols reported that Morgan had withdrawn to Thicketty Creek, and that several groups of partisans were en route to join him. Tarleton determined to push ahead promptly for the purpose of engaging Morgan before he could effect a passage of the Broad, and before his numbers were too greatly augmented. Accordingly at 3 o'clock on the morning of the 17th the pursuit was resumed. The wagons and baggage of his train were left in camp under the protection of a small detachment from each corps.

## PART II



### AMERICAN PLANS MORGAN SENT WEST OF THE CATAWBA

HE disaster which befell the American Army at Camden on the 16th of August resulted in Congress passing a resolution on the 5th of October ordering General Washington to direct a court of inquiry to be held on the conduct of Major General Gates, as commander of the southern army, and to appoint his successor. Washington designated Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene, second in command in the main army, and an officer whose ability, loyalty, and capacity for command were fully appreciated by the commander in chief. On the receipt of instructions from General Washington and Congress, Greene proceeded south, stopping in Philadelphia to confer with Congress, and in the several States on his way, which were immediately concerned in furnishing men and supplies for the Southern Department. He desired to acquire a knowledge of the military situation therein, and plan for the regular support and subsistence of his command in provisions, forage, and transportation. Before leaving Philadelphia he wrote to Washington that his first object would be to equip a flying army of 800 horses and 1,000 Infantry. Greene held the services of Cavalry and mounted Infantry in high regard, the contrary view being entertained by the officer whom he was to relieve. Lieut. Col. Henry Lee was one of the officers whom he desired to conduct partisan warfare, which he knew would constitute an important factor in his campaigns.

General Greene reached Charlotte Town, where Gates's headquarters were now established, on the 2d of December, and on the following day the latter issued his final order to the troops, turning the command over to General Greene. While traversing Maryland,



Virginia, and North Carolina, wise and energetic measures had been taken by Greene, in consultation with the State authorities, to insure that cooperation and assistance would be forthcoming. A survey of his troops at once confirmed his previous knowledge of their needs for food, clothing, transportation, and shelter, as learned from Gates's reports on these matters, and his attention to the correction of these deficiencies was incessant and laborious. His ability as a quartermaster was in no wise inferior to his worth as a commander in the field, and the detailed manner in which he directed the betterment of conditions is a high tribute to his general efficiency. The logistics of supply were carefully covered in his many instructions for the surveys of all possible water routes, the construction of bateaux, the listing of animals and wagons for transportation, and for the operation of mills, ironworks, and other utilities.

Pending improvement in his numbers, and augmentation in the necessary supplies, the army was to remain inactive. The country around Charlotte Town had been depleted so thoroughly of food and forage, that on the 8th of December Greene wrote to Colonel Kosciusko to examine the country along the Peedee for a distance of 20 or 30 miles south of Little River, for a good position for the army.

During this enforced period of combat inaction and rehabilitation, intelligence of the enemy was most essential, particularly in view of the many rumors that Cornwallis was to be reinforced by way of the Cape Fear, or through Charleston. For this work troops that were well mounted and extremely mobile were necessary, due to the great distance covered, and Marion, who operated in the eastern part of South Carolina, was selected for this duty. On the 4th of December a letter of instructions was sent to this officer by Greene directing him to continue partisan warfare, thereby harassing the enemy and preserving the tide of sentiment among the people as much as possible in favor of the patriotic cause. Upon Marion he would depend for early information of reinforcements

arriving in Charleston, or departing therefrom to join Cornwallis. To secure this information, and other that might be necessary, Marion was to employ spies and organize an intelligence service.

The unhappy condition of the southern army is pictured in a letter written to Washington on the 7th of December, wherein Greene says:

Nothing can be more wretched and distressing than the condition of the troops, starving, with cold and hunger, without tents and camp equipage. Those of the Virginia line are literally naked, and a great part totally unfit for any kind of duty, and must remain so until clothing can be had from the northward.

The magnitude of the work confronting Greene in his responsibility for the retention of the Southern States in the Confederation, and the earnestness with which he engaged in his labors, will be understood by reading the seven lengthy letters written by him on the 6th and 7th of December to Baron von Steuben, who was in Virginia under his command, General Washington, General Knox, the President of Congress, the Board of War, Governor Nash, and Governor Jefferson.

After two weeks of arduous attention to a multitude of details, report having been received in the meanwhile from Kosciusko of a favorable site for the army on the Peedee, the troops were put under marching orders on the 16th, but due to heavy rains the march was postponed until the 20th. The route followed was by way of Wadesborough to Haleys Ferry, thence to the position selected on the east bank of the Peedee, opposite to Cheraw Hill, which was reached on the 26th. General Greene called his new location a "camp of repose," adding in this connection, in a letter to Washington written on the 28th of December, "no army ever wanted one more, the troops having totally lost their discipline."

General Greene was fortunate in his selection of officers to surround him, and part of his success in the South must be attributed to these capable leaders and administrators. There were Von Steuben, Lee and his legion, which joined on the Peedee early in January, Williams, Morgan, William Washington, Howard, Carrington,

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Davie, and the partisan leaders, Sumter, Marion, Pickens, and others, all highly reputed as leaders in their several lines of activities, imbued with a spirit of loyalty for their commander, and possessed of an unquenchable determination to attain the independence of their country.

Before departing from Charlotte Town, General Greene arranged to send General Morgan with an independent command to operate along the tributaries of the Broad and Pacolet, threatening the British post at Ninety Six and the left of Cornwallis's army. During the great depression which existed in the South after the defeat of Gates at Camden, and while the British were triumphantly advancing to Charlotte Town, Morgan had returned to active duty in the Army and joined Gates at Hillsborough in September. Congress appointed him a brigadier general on the 13th of October.

The duty to be performed by Morgan's command was so far removed from Greene's headquarters, with the British Army between, that detailed instructions were prepared for his guidance:

CAMP CHARLOTTE, *December 16, 1780.*

You are appointed to the command of a corps of light infantry of 320 men detached from the Maryland line, a detachment of Virginia militia of 200 men, and Colonel Washington's regiment of light horse, amounting to from sixty to a hundred men. With these troops you will proceed to the west side of the Catawba River, where you will be joined by a body of volunteer militia under command of General Davidson of this State, and by the militia lately under command of General Sumter. This force and such others as may join you from Georgia, you will employ against the enemy on the west side of the Catawba, either offensively or defensively, as your own prudence and discretion may direct—acting with caution and avoiding surprises by every possible precaution. For the present, I give you the entire command in that quarter, and do hereby require all officers and soldiers engaged in the American cause to be subject to your orders and commands.

The object of this detachment is to give protection to that part of the country and spirit up the people—to annoy the enemy in that quarter—to collect the provision and forage out of their way—which you will have formed into a number of small magazines in the rear of the position you may think proper to take. You will prevent plundering as much as possible and be as careful of your provisions and forage as may be, giving receipts for whatever you take to all such as are friends to the independence of America.

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Should the enemy move in force toward the Pee Dee, where the army will take a position, you will move in such a direction as to enable you to join me if necessary, or fall upon the flank, or into the rear of the enemy, as occasion may require. You will spare no pains to get good intelligence of the enemy's situation and keep me constantly advised of both your and their movements. You will appoint, for the time being, a commissary, quartermaster, and forage master, who will follow your instructions in their respective lines. Confiding in your abilities and activity, I entrust you with this command, being persuaded you will do everything in your power to distress the enemy and afford protection to the country.

Given under my hand at Charlotte this 16th December, 1780.

To Brig. Gen. MORGAN.

NATH. GREENE.

Morgan's command of approximately 600 men left Charlotte Town on the 21st of December, reaching the Catawba that evening, and the following morning crossed the river at Biggers Ferry. From thence the march led to Cane Creek, and the following day, the 24th, the Broad was crossed, and on the 25th camp was made on the north bank of the Pacolet, at Grindalls Ford. Here Morgan was joined, a few days later, by a party of mounted militia under Colonel Pickens and Major McCall.

Early in December General Greene had given orders to General Davidson, of North Carolina, to join Morgan with militia gathered from that State, when the latter had crossed the river; but the British authorities incited the Cherokee Indians to ravage the western settlements, and the men of Burke, Rutherford, Washington, and Sullivan Counties were engaged in safeguarding their homes. Davidson did arrive in Morgan's camp on the Pacolet toward the end of December with 120 men, but returned at once to North Carolina for the drafts that had been ordered to assemble in the district of Salisbury.

On the 27th of December Morgan received intelligence that a body of Georgia Tories, about 250 in number, had advanced as far as Fair Forest, and were committing depredations in that region. For the purpose of routing them he sent Washington's dragoons, and 200 mounted militia under Major McCall, on the 29th. The hostile force was about 20 miles from Grindalls Ford, in the direction



of Ninety Six. The enemy withdrew on the approach of Washington's command, but after a hard march of 40 miles they were encountered the next day at Hammonds Storehouse, and dispersed with great loss. Although at considerable distance from supporting troops, and within range of Ninety Six and Wynneshorough, Washington proceeded to march against a British post called Fort Williams, on the road from Wynneshorough to Ninety Six, and about 15 miles northeast of the latter place. General Cunningham, who was in charge of the Tory militia in this region, evacuated the fort, and Washington perceived the wisdom of retracing his steps to the Pacolet. In the meanwhile Morgan detached 200 men to cover the withdrawal of Washington's command, to guard against any misfortune that might occur to it.

At the time of reporting the success at Hammonds Storehouse, Morgan wrote to Greene on the 31st that the militia were coming in fast, and suggested that when he had collected his force he desired to march into Georgia, if the main army could, at the time, make a diversion against Cornwallis. To expedite this movement, should it meet with the approval of General Greene, he had sent for 100 swords, which he intended putting into the hands of expert riflemen, to be mounted and incorporated with Washington's corps. He said, "It is incompatible with the nature of light troops to be encumbered with baggage," and called for 100 packsaddles to replace wagon transportation, where necessary or desirable.

Morgan remained on the Pacolet to await a reply to his letter of the 31st of December covering the foregoing suggestion, but developments were now so rapid that it became impossible to give further serious thought to a march on Georgia. Greene knew that Leslie was advancing on Camden, at which place a strong post had been established under Lord Rawdon, and in replying on the 8th of January to Morgan's letter which reached him the 7th, he did not think an expedition into Georgia was "warrantable in the critical situation our Army is in." "Should you go into Georgia, and the enemy push this way, your whole force will be useless."

Greene intimated to Morgan that by remaining where he was he was favorably situated to interrupt communications with Ninety Six and Augusta, and to harass the enemy rear should Cornwallis attempt to push forward. He was cautioned to attempt no major enterprise, unless by surprise, "for you will only beat your heads against the wall without success." As a further warning, Greene added: "I must repeat my caution to you to guard against a surprise."

Before receiving from General Greene a reply to his letter of December 31, Morgan wrote the former again on January 4, as to the difficulties of obtaining forage and provisions in the vicinity of his camp, and declared the necessity either to move into Georgia or retreat. He had spies watching the enemy and did not consider himself in danger of being surprised. Greene replied to this communication on the 13th with the advice that Morgan hold his present ground, as a retreat would discourage the militia, and informed him that "Colonel Tarleton is said to be on his way to pay you a visit." This letter did not reach its destination before the action at the Cowpens.

On the 14th of January Morgan learned that Tarleton had crossed the Tiger at Musgroves Mill, and he prepared to change his position in the direction of the Broad. Leaving detachments to observe the fords over the Pacolet, the army was put in motion on the 15th, and that evening camped at Burrs Mills on Thicketty Creek. It was on this same day that Tarleton reached the Pacolet and reconnoitered the crossings. His strength was estimated by Morgan to be from 1,100 to 1,200 men.

Continuing his retirement on the 16th, the Cowpens were reached, where small parties joined during the night, and the spirit of the camp was strong for fight. Morgan doubtless viewed this augmentation of strength and the high spirits of the men as a favorable omen, and determined to offer battle the following day. The proposed plan of deployment was explained to the several leaders, particular attention being given to the part the militia, whom



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Pickens was to command, would take in the battle. For the purpose of strengthening Washington's Cavalry, 45 militia were selected for their ability as horsemen and rifle shots, armed with sabers, provided with suitable mounts, and attached to the dragoons.

## PART III



### DEPLOYMENT OF TROOPS~THE BATTLE

HE place where General Morgan established his camp the night of the 16th was near the intersection of the Mill Gap Road and the road from the present city of Spartanburg running northeast into North Carolina, and crossing the Broad River at Island Ford. Many roads of more recent construction now traverse this territory, but during the Revolutionary period they were few in number. The Mill Gap Road crossed the Broad at Cherokee Ford and ran northwestwardly through the present town of Gaffney, into the mountains far to the west. Its course followed generally the tops of ridges, thereby avoiding the crossing of creeks and rivers. The road from Spartanburg to North Carolina now runs through Chesnee, but in olden days it crossed the Mill Gap Road about 3 miles southeast of Chesnee. Morgan made camp in a wooded ravine having a stream of water running through it, which lay north of the Mill Gap Road, and about a thousand yards northwest of the cabin of Robert Scruggs, which was visited by Lossing in 1849.

The position selected for the action lay on both sides of the Mill Gap Road, just south of the camp. The ground is slightly undulating, and at the time was covered with scattered trees of red oak, hickory, and pine. Being used for the grazing of cattle, there was but little, if any, underbrush. Two very slight elevations top the ridge along which the Mill Gap Road runs, and these were selected as the lines of deployment for the American troops.

The main position was on the elevation just south of the ravine, in which camp was established. To its front for 300 yards there is a scarcely perceptible slope downward; beyond this the slope is

greater, dropping off into a shallow ravine 700 yards from the main position. To the rear of the main position, and just west of the camp site, is an elevation slightly higher than that of the main position. This ridge continues across the road in a south and southwest direction, but at a slightly less elevation. From either ridge the terrain between the two was visible under and through the trees. The ground offered no cover for either the attack or the defense, except such as was furnished by the trees. The flanks of both armies were exposed, as the terrain was favorable in all directions for the operation of mounted troops. The ravine in which Morgan camped and one on the opposite side of the road offered but little interference with the movement of foot or mounted troops.

Morgan's plan of battle was to use the Maryland Continentals and the Virginia Militia (of worth equal to the Continentals, as many had served in previous campaigns) in his main position on the summit of the southernmost ridge and astride the Mill Gap Road. Washington's dragoons to the number of 80, augmented by the 45 militia under McCall, were the main reserve, posted in rear of the northernmost ridge, where ground cover was sufficient to protect them from hostile observation and fire and sufficiently near "as to be able to charge the enemy, should they be broken." The militia were to form an interrupted line on the flanks in front, which position was to be held only temporarily, when they were to withdraw and reform on the flanks of the main position after reorganization had been effected and lend what assistance they could as an additional reserve.

At this time Howard's Maryland and Delaware Continentals consisted of 237 men. They were placed on the left of the line, astride the Mill Gap Road. To their right were Captain Beatie's and Major Triplett's companies of Virginia Militia, under the command of the latter, and totaling about 100 men. Captains Tate and Buchanan, with about 100 of the Augusta riflemen of Virginia, supported the right of the line. In the advanced position, which was to be abandoned early in the fight, were about 308 militia from North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, under

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Colonel Pickens. These troops were situated to guard the flanks. Major McDowell, of the North Carolina Volunteers, was posted on the right flank, 150 yards in front of Howard's line. Major Cunningham, of the Georgia Volunteers, was on the left flank, at the same distance in front of Howard's line. To the right of Major McDowell were posted the South Carolina Volunteers under Colonels Brannon and Thomas. To the left of Major Cunningham was posted the remainder of the South Carolina Militia, under Colonel Hays and Major Hammond. The latter commanded Major McCall's regiment, he being with Colonel Washington.

From Pickens's line of militia small parties of riflemen were sent 150 yards farther to the front to skirmish with the enemy. McDowell commanded those in the right sector of the skirmish line and Cunningham those in the left sector. Patrols covered the front and flanks to give warning of Tarleton's approach.

Tarleton broke camp at 3 o'clock in the morning, determined to engage the Americans before they could cross the Broad, or in case they made an early march and continued their withdrawal, to strike them when astride the river. The baggage and wagons were to remain in camp, under protection of a detachment from each corps, until daybreak. The advance guard consisted of three companies of light infantry, supported by the legion infantry. The main body comprised the Seventh Regiment, the two 3-pounders, and the First Battalion of the Seventy-first Infantry. The cavalry and mounted infantry brought up the rear. The march was slow, due to the ground being broken by creeks and ravines, and the necessity for careful reconnoissance on the front and flanks. Before dawn a screen of cavalry was placed on the front, soon after which contact was made with the American patrols, when Tarleton ordered two troops of dragoons to reinforce the advance guard and harass the rear of the enemy.

In due course of time the advance guard reported that the Americans were forming, and the native guides with Tarleton described their position as in an open woods, free from swamps, with the Broad parallel to their rear.

Tarleton viewed the enemy's situation as one vulnerable to attack, particularly in view of his superiority in cavalry, and the inability of a defeated force to escape beyond the Broad. Furthermore, the supposed nearness of Cornwallis and the assumed superiority of his regulars over the large percentage of militia with Morgan made it seem apparent that success should be attended with no great loss to his command. His total strength, including the detachment left to guard the baggage, was about 1,000.

The dragoons in the advance guard drove in the hostile covering forces along the Mill Gap Road, thereby enabling Tarleton to proceed far enough to inspect the deployment of Morgan's army. It is probable that his estimate of the strength of the opposing forces was considerably less than the total of 1,920 mentioned later in his narrative. Even though he believed that he was opposed by about 500 Continentals, 120 cavalry, 1,000 militia, and 300 backwoodsmen, he probably ignored the two latter groups, and considered himself superior in quality to the American Continentals and cavalry, who made a force much smaller than his regulars.

Prior to deploying the infantry were directed to discard all surplus equipment and retain only their rifles and ammunition. The light infantry then filed to the right, into a position opposite to Morgan's militia, with their right flank extending as far as the left of the militia. The legion infantry were added to the left of the light infantry, and a 3-pounder placed in the line between the two commands. This force was instructed to advance within 300 yards of the enemy. When this position was reached, the Seventh Regiment formed upon the left of the legion infantry, and the other 3-pounder was given to the right division of the Seventh. A captain, with 50 dragoons, was placed on each flank of the line, to protect its flanks and threaten those of the enemy. The First Battalion of the Seventy-first Regiment formed 150 yards in rear of the left flank of the Seventh, and constituted, together with about 200 legion cavalry, the reserve.

The British deployment being completed at about 8 o'clock, Tarleton ordered his troops to attack. The whole line moved with



the greatest impetuosity, shouting as they advanced. The Americans responded with Indian war cries of equal intensity, and held their fire until the enemy closed to effective rifle range, when the front-line skirmishers under Cunningham and McDowell gave them a "heavy and galling fire, and retreated to the regiments intended for their support." Tarleton's infantry suffered but little from this fire and continued their approach to Pickens's line, which "kept up a fire by regiments, retreating agreeably to their orders." Still the British line suffered but little, and now it approached the Continentals and the Virginians under Howard. Here, according to Morgan, they received a "well-directed and incessant fire." Tarleton says "the fire on both sides was well supported, and produced much slaughter." The British advance was temporarily checked.

At this time Tarleton sent the troop of dragoons on the right of the line to harass that portion of the militia which had fallen back to the left of Pickens's line, and at the same time ordered forward his reserve. The First Battalion of the Seventy-first was directed to pass the left of the Seventh before delivering its fire. The reserve cavalry and the troop on the left of the line were ordered to incline to the left and form a line which would embrace the whole of the American right flank. When the battalion of the Seventy-first was in position, the entire British line moved forward. Tarleton now had about 750 infantry in line, supported by two guns, and was opposed by less than 450 infantry in Howard's line. Whether or not the militia, which had withdrawn to the two flanks of Howard's line, could be later assembled and used in the fight could not at this time be determined. Those who had withdrawn to the left rear of the main position were charged by the troop of dragoons from the right of Tarleton's line and were being cut down, when Washington countercharged with his cavalry, supported by some infantry fire, and relieved the situation in that quarter.

It was evident to Howard that with the enemy reserve brought into action his right flank was exposed, and he ordered the flank company to change front to the right. In doing this some confusion



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ensued, and first a part and then the whole of the company commenced a retreat. The officers along Howard's line seeing this, and supposing that orders had been given for a retreat, faced their men about and moved off. Morgan, at this time, was engaged in reforming the militia, and was surprised to observe the Maryland and Delaware Continentals, who had fought so valiantly at Camden, in apparent retreat. He quickly rode over to Howard to inquire into the situation and his apprehensions were quieted when Howard, pointing to the line, observed that "men were not beaten who retreated in that order." Morgan then ordered Howard to continue retiring his line until the rising ground to the rear was reached, and rode back to select the position on which the line was to halt and face about.

The halt and change of front was effected without mishap, and although this retreat resulted from misunderstanding, it was very fortunate, as Howard's units were thereby extricated from a position wherein they doubtless would have been defeated with heavy losses.

So certain were the British that victory was at hand that they pushed forward to close in on the retreating force with the bayonet, and an order was dispatched to the cavalry on the right to charge. Not more than 30 yards separated them from the Americans, when the latter unexpectedly halted and changed front, and again confronted them with a deadly volley, which stopped the British in their tracks and threw them into great confusion.

Lieutenant Colonel Howard observing this, gave orders for the line to charge bayonets, which was done with such address, that they fled with the utmost precipitation, leaving their field pieces in our possession.

Some of the militia which had withdrawn to Howard's right were reformed and participated in the rout.

Further exertions to make the British infantry advance were useless. Nor could Tarleton's cavalry strike, for it was at the moment when they were prepared to charge the retreating line that Howard halted and faced his command about, and the panic which seized

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the British infantry extended to the cavalry also, and a general flight ensued. Tarleton sent directions to his cavalry to form about 400 yards to the right of the enemy, whilst he endeavored to rally the infantry to protect the guns.

The cavalry did not comply with the order, and the effort to collect the infantry was ineffectual; neither promises nor threats could gain their attention; they surrendered or dispersed, and abandoned the guns to the artillerymen, who defended them for some time with exemplary resolution.

In this last stage of defeat, Tarleton in his narrative says that he made a final struggle to bring his cavalry to the charge, but all attempts to restore order proved fruitless.

Above 200 dragoons forsook their leader and left the field of battle.

He was able to rally a group of 14 officers and about 40 horsemen, and with these engaged the cavalry of Washington, who in the latter stage of the fight were adding to the general confusion of the enemy by passing around Howard's right and charging into the broken ranks of the enemy. The contest between the two mounted groups was short lived, and Tarleton fled from the field, the action having lasted about 50 minutes. He directed his course to the south-east in order to reach Hamilton Ford, near the mouth of Bullock Creek, where he might communicate with Cornwallis, who had not advanced beyond Turkey Creek. A part of Washington's command pursued scattered groups of the enemy cavalry for some distance, returning to camp late that night.

The British losses, as reported by General Morgan in a letter dated the 19th of January, were 10 officers and 100 noncommissioned officers and privates killed; 200 rank and file wounded; 502 noncommissioned officers and privates prisoners, independent of the wounded, and 29 commissioned officers prisoners. This totals approximately 841, and is somewhat in excess of the entire British infantry and artillery personnel in the battle. The losses in the legion cavalry were not heavy, and that night and the next day 200 of their scattered numbers rejoined Tarleton. The spoils of war

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included 2 standards, 2 field pieces, 800 stand of arms, 100 dragoon horses, and 35 wagons. The baggage which had been left in camp was in a great measure destroyed by its guard before they fled.

Cornwallis's return of troops shows the following changes in the organizations under Tarleton's command:

	Jan. 15	Feb. 1
Seventh Regiment .....	167	.....
Seventy-first Regiment:		
First Battalion .....	249	.....
Light company .....	69	.....
British Legion .....	451	174
	936	174

In addition to the foregoing, Tarleton had about 40 men of the Seventeenth Dragoons and a detachment of artillery to man the two 3-pounders. The American losses were inconsiderable, there not having been more than 12 killed and about 60 wounded.

Tarleton attributed his defeat to—

the bravery or good conduct of the Americans; to the loose manner of forming which had always been practiced by the King's troops in America; or to some unforeseen event, which may throw terror into the most disciplined soldiers or counteract the best-concerted designs.


He held the opinion that commanding officers in the Army, who were unfortunate in action, should be subject to the same rules which governed the Navy, to the effect that a court-martial would inquire into the merits of the case. Influenced by this thought, some days after the action Tarleton "required Earl Cornwallis's approbation of his proceedings, or his leave to retire till inquiry could be instituted to investigate his conduct." To this demand Cornwallis replied in a letter of the 30th of January:

You have forfeited no part of my esteem as an officer by the unfortunate event of the action of the 17th. The means you used to bring the enemy to action were able and masterly, and must ever do you honor. Your disposition was unexceptionable; the total misbehavior of the troops could alone have deprived you of the glory which was so justly your due.

## PART IV



### COMMENTS AND CONCLUSIONS

T is difficult to understand General Morgan's reasons for accepting battle at the Cowpens, unless his personal characteristics for bravery and daring and his superior qualities as a leader of militia explain the matter. The instructions which he received before leaving Charlotte Town were that he was to act offensively or defensively, as his prudence and discretion might direct, but that he was to conduct operations with caution and avoid surprises. When he effected his withdrawal from the Pacolet in the face of Tarleton's approach he halted for the night of the 15th at Burrs Mills, on Thicketty Creek, and sent to Greene the last letter written prior to the battle. At this time he had no thought of an early encounter. He reported that Tarleton had crossed the Tiger at Musgroves Mill with a force of 1,100 or 1,200, and that his command was probably Tarleton's objective. He suggested to General Greene that his detachment be recalled and that General Davidson and Colonel Pickens be left with the militia to check the disaffected in that region. He realized that, due to his distance from the main Army, Cornwallis might detach a force against him so superior as to render it essential to his safety to avoid an engagement. He wrote:

Upon a full and mature deliberation, I am confirmed in the opinion that nothing can be effected by my detachment in this country which will balance the risks I will be subjected to by remaining here.

General Greene replied to this letter on the 19th of January, at which time he was unaware that an engagement had occurred, to the effect that it was of great importance to keep a force in that



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quarter, for which duty the militia alone would not answer. He realized that the movements of Cornwallis and Tarleton had the appearance of being directed against Morgan, and told him:

I do not wish you should come to action unless you have a manifest superiority, and a moral certainty of succeeding. Put nothing to the hazard. A retreat may be disagreeable, but not disgraceful. Regard not the opinions of the day. It is not our business to risk too much. Our affairs are in too critical a situation, and require time and nursing to give them a better tone.

Upon his further withdrawal to the Cowpens on the 16th, where additional militia joined, and with the knowledge that Tarleton was closely pursuing and was now but one short march away, Morgan decided that evening to stand and fight. The decision once made, however much its wisdom may be questioned, there can be no doubt about the enthusiasm and thoroughness with which he prepared for the coming day. A plan of action was determined upon, and his commanders informed. The rôle for the militia was such that under a slight baptism of fire, it was hoped much of their fear would be dissipated, and that they would remain on the battle field for later participation in the contest. Appeal was made to their loyalty, their manhood, and their prowess with the rifle. There was no question but what Washington's dragoons, Howard's Continentals, and Triplett's Virginians would do their full duty. The men were able to rest during the night, and after the morning meal leisurely took up their designated positions.

Not much praise can be given for the position selected, except that the slope in front of Pickens impeded, to some extent the advance of Tarleton's weary ranks, and the hill in rear offered cover for the cavalry reserve. In all directions the terrain was open to attack from both infantry and cavalry, and Morgan doubtless knew that the cavalry of Tarleton's legion far outnumbered Washington's dragoons.

What superiority he believed to be possessed by the troops under Howard over the infantry of Tarleton can not be explained other than on the grounds that he hoped his own courage great enough

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to cause his men to do the seemingly impossible. In planning for the militia under Pickens to hold their line for but a brief time, and then retire, it would be with the assumption that the British would not have lost heavily by the time they reached the main line. On this line the fate of the day would be determined, and Howard's strength was less than 450 men. Tarleton's strength at this stage of the action would probably be 750 infantry, outnumbering Howard about 2 to 1.

It appeared to the British, when Howard's line fell back, that victory was at hand, and so it would have been, had the line been composed of men less inured to battle than were the Continentals of Maryland and Delaware. There was no delay or hesitation when the order to halt, face the enemy, and fire, was given, and there then occurred in a moment a scene of dumbfounded surprise, confusion, and panic seldom witnessed in battle. The outcome resulted in one of the most gloriously unexpected victories of the Revolutionary War. The heroes of the Cowpens could worthily stand shoulder to shoulder with those of Kings Mountain.

Under a resolution of Congress passed March 9, 1781, the thanks of the United States were given to Brigadier General Morgan, and the officers and men under his command, "for their fortitude and good conduct, displayed in the action at the Cowpens." The resolution further provided that a gold medal be presented to General Morgan, silver medals to Lieutenant Colonels Washington and Howard, and a sword to Colonel Pickens.

In writing to the President of Congress on the 17th of February, General Washington said:

General Morgan's signal victory over Colonel Tarleton with the flower of the British Army reflects the highest honor upon our arms, and I hope at least be attended with this advantage, that it will check the offensive operations of the enemy until General Greene shall have collected a much more respectable force than he had under his command by the last accounts from him. I am apprehensive that the Southern States will look upon this victory as much more decisive in its consequences than it really is, and will relax in their exertions. It is to be wished that the gentlemen of Congress who have interests in those States would remove



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such ideas, if any such should be found to exist, and rather stimulate them to redouble their efforts to crush an enemy, pretty severely shaken by the two successful strokes upon Ferguson and Tarleton.

Cornwallis employed the day following the battle in effecting a junction with Leslie's command and in collecting the remains of Tarleton's corps, and on the 19th hastened in pursuit of Morgan, hoping to be able to engage him and recover the prisoners before Morgan and Greene could effect a junction. A part of the army, without baggage, made great exertions to come up with Morgan, but the celerity of his movements and the swelling of numberless creeks rendered their efforts useless, and he reached the Catawba on the 23d of January.

Cornwallis therefore assembled his army on the 25th of January at Ramseur's mill, on the South Fork of the Catawba, and as the loss of his light troops could only be remedied by the activity of the whole corps, he employed two days in collecting flour, and in destroying superfluous baggage and wagons, and then resumed the pursuit.

In writing to Lord Germain on the 17th of March, Cornwallis said that—

The unfortunate affair of the 17th of January was a very unexpected and severe blow; for, besides reputation, our loss did not fall short of 600 men. However, being thoroughly sensible that defensive measures would be certain ruin to the affairs of Britain in the Southern Colonies, this event did not deter me from prosecuting the original plan.

Tarleton in his narrative, commenting on the two disasters which the British suffered in South Carolina, said that the fall of Ferguson at Kings Mountain was a catastrophe which put an end to the first expedition into North Carolina, and that the Battle of the Cowpens overshadowed the commencement of the second expedition. This comment taken in conjunction with the above-mentioned apprehension of General Washington, "that the Southern States will look upon this victory as much more decisive in its consequences than it really is," briefly summarizes the result of the Battle

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of the Cowpens. The effect at the time was to hearten greatly the patriotic cause and to distress the British Army and their Tory sympathizers beyond measure. It was the second link in the chain of events, soon to be followed by others, which finally led to the surrender of Cornwallis's army at Yorktown.



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## THE BATTLE OF THE COWPENS

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# Battle of The Cowpens.

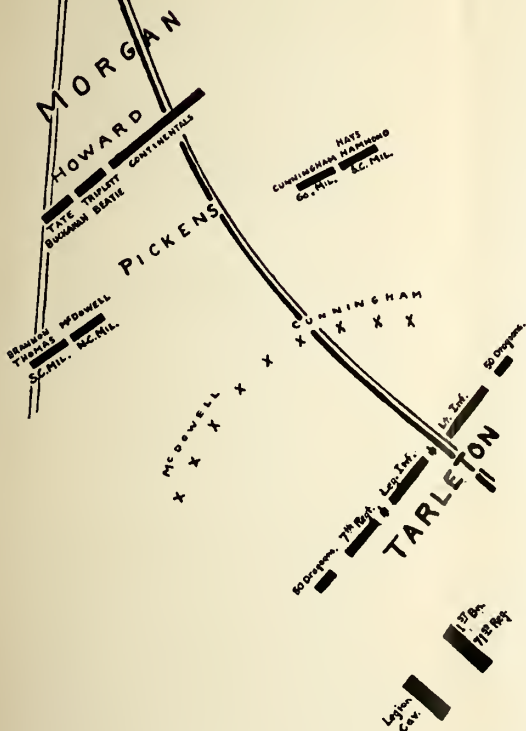
JANUARY 17, 1781

Americans - Brig. Gen. Morgan.

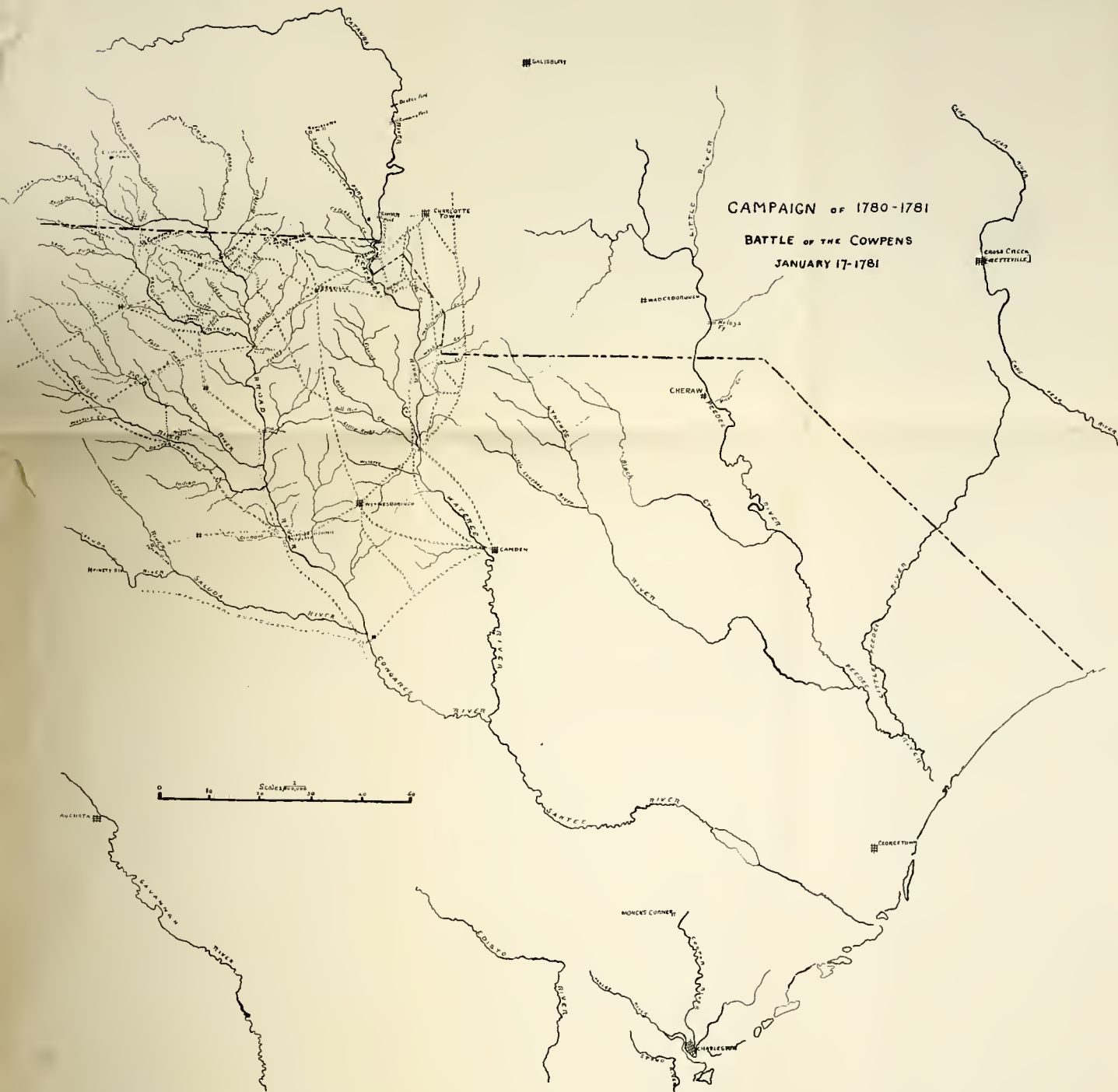
British - - Lt. Col. Tarleton.

Battle Formation  
Shown in sketch

0 1 2 3 4 500 Yds.













Monument erected in 1856 by the Washington Light Infantry of Charleston, S. C.  
 There is no other monument or marker on the battle field of the Cowpens.  
 Howard's line ran very close to where this monument is located.  
 The Martin house in the background  
 (April, 1928)



Battle ground of the Cowpens. Howard's line was in the woods. Tarleton advanced over this ground after driving Pickens back. Picture taken from the Blackwell house.  
 The monument is in the woods in the center of the picture  
 (April, 1928)



Battle ground of the Cowpens. In the background are the woods in which Howard's line was formed. Pickens's line and skirmishers were in front of Howard's line. Tarleton attacked over this ground. The highway shown passes through the battle ground. It is an excellent roadway. Blackwell's house to the left  
(April, 1928)



Thicketty Mountain in the middle background. Picture taken from a position northwest of Thicketty. From the direction of Gaffney and Grindall Shoals Thicketty appears more extensive and is more of a landmark than when viewed from the northwest  
(April, 1928)



Home of George Blackwell, on the battle field of the Cowpens  
(April, 1928)



Robert Scruggs's house, where Lossing stopped in 1849. A log cabin of one room was constructed over one hundred years ago adjacent to the chimney shown in the picture. The cabin has since been weather boarded, and extensions added. The present occupant is Mrs. Black Scruggs, widow of the youngest son of Robert Scruggs  
(April, 1928)











